THE CHOICE OF BOOKS

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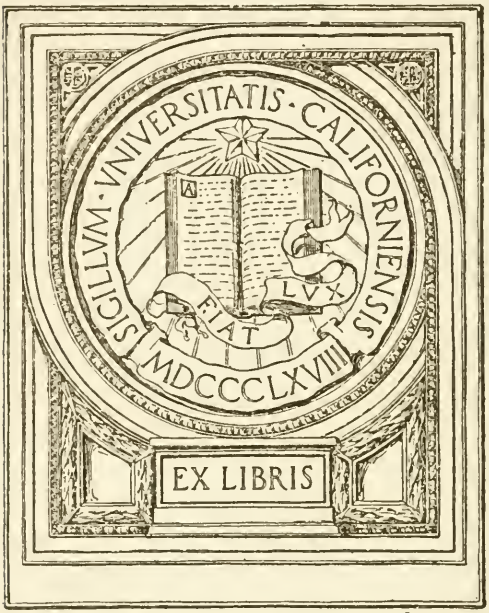

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THE

CHOICE OF BOOKS.

BY

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THE CHOICE OF BOOKS.

THE MOTIVE OF READING.

"Of making many books there is no end," said the wisest of men three thousand years ago; and he added the equally true statement that "much study"—that is, much reading—"is a weariness of the flesh." A fourteenth century commentator, in annotating this text, drew the conclusion that all the books which may be rightly read are "the bokis of hooli scripture," and "other bokis, that ben nedeful to the understonding of hooli scripture." Modern readers, reared outside the close atmosphere of mediæval cloisters, make a somewhat more liberal application of this maxim of Ecclesiastes; but all will agree that a wise choice must be made from the great stores of literature that the ages have accumulated, from the days of papyrus scrolls and birchbark writings, to these times, when scarcely any country town is without its printing-press. "We are now," says Disraeli, "in want of an art to teach how books are to be read, rather than to read them; such an art is practicable."

The very first thing to be remembered by him who would study the art of reading is that nothing can take the place of personal enthusiasm and personal work. However wise may be the friendly adviser, and however full and perfect the chosen hand-book of reading, neither can do more than to stimulate and suggest. Nothing can take the place of a direct familiarity with books themselves. To *know* one good book well is better than to know something *about* a hundred good books at second hand. The taste for reading and the habit of reading must always be developed from within; they can never be added from without.

All plans and systems of reading, therefore, should be taken, as far as possible, into one's heart of hearts, and be made a part of his own mind and thought. Unless this can be done, they are worse than useless. Dr. McCosh says: "The book to read is not the one that thinks for you, but the one which makes you think." It is plain, then, that a "course of reading" may be a great good or a great evil, according to its use. The late Bishop Alonzo Potter, one of the most judicious of literary helpers, offered to readers this sound piece of advice. "Do not be so enslaved by any system or course of study, as to think it may not be altered." However conscious one may be of his own deficiencies, and however he may feel the need of outside aid, he should never permit his own independence and self-respect to be obliterated. "He who reads incessantly," says Milton,

> And to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep versed in books, but shallow in himself.

The general agreement of intelligent people as to the merit of an author or the worth of a book, is, of course, to be accepted until one finds some valid reason for reversing it. But nothing is to be gained by pretending to like what one really dislikes, or to enjoy what one does not find profitable, or even intelligible. If a reader is not honest and sincere in this matter, there is small hope for him. The lowest taste may be cultivated and improved, and radically changed; but pretense and artificiality can never grow into anything better. They must be wholly rooted out at the start. If you dislike Shakespeare's "Hamlet," and greatly enjoy a trashy story, say so with sincerity and sorrow, if occasion requires, and hope and work for a reversal of your taste. "It's guid to be honest and true," says Burns, and nowhere is honesty more needed than here.

It should always be borne in mind that the busiest reader must leave unread all but a mere fraction of the good books in the world. "Be not alarmed because so many books are recommended," says Bishop Potter; and "do not attempt to read much or fast;" but "dare to be ignorant of many things." There are now 1,100,000 printed

books in the library of the British Museum alone; and the library of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris contains more than 3,000,000 volumes. Mr. F. B. Perkins, an experienced librarian, estimates that not less than 25,000 new books now appear annually; and yet the reading of a book a fortnight, or say twenty-five books a year, is quite as much as the average reader can possibly achieve—a rate at which only 1,250 books could be read in half a century. Since this is so, he must be very thoughtless and very timid who feels any shame in confessing that he is wholly ignorant of a great many books; and on the other hand, none but a very superficial and conceited reader will venture to express surprise at the deficiencies of others, when a little thought would make his own so clearly manifest. In Cowper's words:

> Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
> Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

THE READING HABIT.

There are some persons who are so fortunate as to be unable to tell when they formed the habit of reading; who find it a constant and ever-increasing advantage and pleasure, their whole lives long, and who will not lay it down so long as they live. There are women and men in the world whose youth and whose old age are so bound up in the reading habit that, if questioned as to its first inception and probable end, they could only reply like Dimple-chin and Grizzled-face in Mr. Stedman's pretty poem of "Toujours Amour." "Ask some younger lass than I;" "Ask some older sage than I." Happy are those whose early surroundings thus permit them to form the reading habit unconsciously; whose parents and friends surround them with good books and periodicals; and whose time is so apportioned in childhood and youth, as to permit them to give a fair share of it to reading, as well as to study in school on the one hand, and physical labor on the other. It is plain that a great duty and responsibility thus rests upon the parents, and guardians, and teachers of the young, at the very outset. It is theirs to

furnish the books, and to stimulate and suggest, in every wise way, the best methods of reading.

Just where, in this early formation of the reading habit, absolute direction should end and advice begin, is a matter which the individual parent or guardian must decide for himself, in large measure. Perhaps there is greater danger of too much direction than of too much suggestion. It is well to allow the young reader, in great part, the power of forming his own plans and making his own choice. Of this promotion of self-development Herbert Spencer says: "In education the process of self-development should be encouraged to the fullest extent. Children should be led to make their own investigations, and to draw their own inferences. They should be *told* as little as possible, and induced to *discover* as much as possible. Humanity has progressed solely by self-instruction; and that to achieve the best results each mind must progress somewhat after the same fashion, is continually proved by the marked success of self-made men. Those who have been brought up under the ordinary school-drill, and have carried away with them the idea that education is practicable only in that style, will think it hopeless to make children their own teachers. If, however, they will call to mind that the all-important knowledge of surrounding objects which a child gets in its early years is got without help, if they will remember that the child is self-taught in the use of its mother's tongue; if they will estimate the amount of that experience of life, that out-of-school wisdom which every boy gathers for himself; if they will mark the unusual intelligence of the uncared for London *gamin*, as shown in all directions in which his faculties have been tasked, if, further, they will think how many minds have struggled up unaided, not only through the mysteries of our irrationally planned *curriculum*, but through hosts of other obstacles besides, they will find it a not unreasonable conclusion, that if the subjects be put before him in right order and right form, any pupil of ordinary capacity will surmount his successive difficulties with but little assistance. Who indeed can watch the ceaseless observation and inquiry and inference going on in a child's mind, or listen to its acute remarks on matters within the range of its faculties, without perceiving that these powers which it manifests, if

brought to bear systematically upon any studies *within the same range*, would readily master them without help? This need for perpetual telling is the result of our stupidity, not of the child's. We drag it away from the facts in which it is interested, and which it is actively assimilating of itself; we put before it facts far too complex for it to understand, and therefore distasteful to it; finding that it will not voluntarily acquire these facts, we thrust them into its mind by force of threats and punishment; by thus denying the knowledge it craves, and cramming it with knowledge it cannot digest, we produce a morbid state of its faculties, and a consequent disgust for knowledge in general; and when, as a result partly of the stolid indifference we have brought on, and partly of still continued unfitness in its studies, the child can understand nothing without explanation, and becomes a mere passive recipient of our instruction, we infer that education must necessarily be carried on thus. Having by our method induced helplessness, we straightway make the helplessness a reason for our method.

After making all needed deductions from the somewhat impatient spirit in which Mr. Spencer here speaks, it can hardly be questioned that the young reader—and most of these suggestions apply equally well to those who begin to read later in life—will do much for himself; and that, on the whole, he stands in greater need of a judicious guide and helper than of a rigorous ruler and taskmaster. Of course, if he lacks both guidance and government, the latter is better than nothing; and there are times when only stern commandment will avail. But the rule should be made in accordance with the large purpose of helpfulness, not with the strict code alone. The reading habit is a growth, a development, not a creation; and all measures for its cultivation, whether from without or within, should be made with this fact in mind. And where strict and even stern regulation is necessary, that direction will be most profitable which best succeeds in causing itself to be assimilated in the mind of the governed, as a part of that mind, and not as a foreign addition.

Whether the reader, thus helped by wise counselors, be young or old, he should soon become familiar with the advantage of making his reading a part of his daily life. Miss Edith Simcox, one of the wisest of living English-

women, thus presses this point: "No part of a child's school knowledge can be safely allowed to remain long detached from its daily life. The history and geography of lesson books must join on to that of the newspapers; it is almost worse to know the name and date of a writer or a hero, without an independent familiarity with the nature of his books or actions, than to be frankly ignorant of all at once; and in every branch of science it is admitted that a knowledge of definitions and formulas is useless apart from experimental acquaintance with the actual bodies described. An inaccurate general knowledge, that would not stand the test of examination, may even in some cases have more educational value than a few correct and barren facts; and our educational results will not be thoroughly satisfactory if detailed information is imparted faster than circumstantial impressions about its color and bearing."

Mr. Ruskin, too, has recently spoken of the duty of brightening the beginnings of education, and of the evils of cramming, against which, happily, the tide of the best contemporary thought is now setting strongly—never to ebb, let us hope. "Make your children," he says, "happy in their youth; let distinction come to them, if it will, after well-spent and well-remembered years; but let them now break and eat the bread of heaven with gladness and singleness of heart, and send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared; and so heaven send you its grace, before meat, and after it." Of the necessity of making attractive the beginnings of reading, Edward Everett Hale says: "In the first place, we must make this business agreeable. Whichever avenue we take into the maze must be one of the pleasant avenues, or else, in a world which the good God has made very beautiful, the young people will go a-skating, or a-fishing, or a-swimming, or a-voyaging, and not a-reading, and no blame to them." How much can be done by others in making the literary path pleasant, is known to the full by those whose first steps were guided therein by a wise father, or mother, or teacher, or friend. How strongly the lack of the helpful hand is felt none who have missed it will need to be told.

But those who must be their own helpers need not be one whit discouraged. The history of the world is full of bright examples of the value of self-training, as shown by the subsequent success won as readers, and writers, and

workers in every department of life by those who apparently lacked both books to read and time to read them, or even the candle wherewith to light the printed page. It would be easy to fill this whole series of chapters with accounts of the way in which the reading habit has been acquired and followed in the face of every obstacle. But a single bit of personal reminiscence may be taken as the type of thousands; not only because of its touching beauty and its telling force, but because it is the latest to be told. To-morrow some other man of eminence will add no less strong testimony to the possibility of self-education. It is the story told by the Rev. Robert Collyer, who worked his way from the anvil in a little English town, up to a commanding position among American preachers and writers. "Do you want to know," he asked, "how I manage to talk to you in this simple Saxon? I will tell you. I read Bunyan, Crusoe, and Goldsmith when I was a boy, morning, noon, and night. All the rest was task work, these were my delight, with the stories in the Bible, and with Shakespeare when at last the mighty master came within our doors. The rest were as senna to me. These were like a well of pure water, and this is the first step I seem to have taken of my own free will toward the pulpit. . . . I took to these as I took to milk, and, without the least idea what I was doing, got the taste for simple words into the very fiber of my nature. There was day-school for me until I was eight years old, and then I had to turn in and work thirteen hours a day. . . . From the days when we used to spell out Crusoe and old Bunyan there had grown up in me a devouring hunger to read books. It made small matter what they were, so they were books. Half a volume of an old encyclopædia came along—the first I had ever seen. How many times I went through that I cannot even guess. I remember that I read some old reports of the Missionary Society with the greatest delight. There were chapters in them about China and Labrador. Yet I think it is in reading as it is in eating, when the first hunger is over you begin to be a little critical, and will by no means take to garbage if you are of a wholesome nature. And I remember this because it touches this beautiful valley of the Hudson. I could not go home for the Christmas of 1839, and was feeling very sad about it all, for I was only a boy; and

sitting by the fire, an old farmer came in and said: 'I notice thou's fond o' reading, so I brought thee summat to read.' It was Irving's 'Sketch-Book.' I had never heard of the work. I went at it, and was 'as them that dream.' No such delight had touched me since the old days of Crusoe. I saw the Hudson and the Catskills, took poor Rip at once into my heart, as everybody has, pitied Ichabod while I laughed at him, thought the old Dutch feast a most admirable thing, and long before I was through, all regret at my lost Christmas had gone down the wind, and I had found out there are books and books. That vast hunger to read never left me. If there was no candle, I poked my head down to the fire; read while I was eating, blowing the bellows, or walking from one place to another. I could read and walk four miles an hour. The world centered in books. There was no thought in my mind of any good to come out of it; the good lay in the reading. I had no more idea of being a minister than you elder men who were boys then, in this town, had that I should be here to-night to tell this story. Now, give a boy a passion like this for anything, books or business, painting or farming, mechanism or music, and you give him thereby a lever to lift his world, and a patent of nobility, if the thing he does is noble. There were two or three of my mind about books. We became companions, and gave the roughs a wide berth. The books did their work, too, about that drink, and fought the devil with a finer fire. I remember while I was yet a lad reading Macaulay's great essay on Bacon, and I could grasp its wonderful beauty. There has been no time when I have not felt sad that there should have been no chance for me at a good education and training. I miss it every day, but such chances as were left lay in that everlasting hunger to still be reading. I was tough as leather, and could do the double stint, and so it was that, all unknown to myself, I was as one that soweth good seed in his field."

With young or old, there is no such helper toward the reading habit as the cultivation of this warm and undying feeling of the *friendliness* of books. If a parent, or a teacher, or a book, seems but a task-master; if their rules are those of a statute-book and their society like that of an officer of the law, there is small hope that their help can be made either serviceable or profitable. But with

the growth of the friendly feeling comes a state of mind which renders all things possible. When one book has become a friend and fellow, the world has grown that much broader and more beautiful. Petrarch said of his books, considered as his friends (I borrow the translation from the excellent treasure-house of quotations on books and reading, prefixed by Dr. Allibone to his "Dictionary of Authors"): "I have friends, whose society is extremely agreeable to me; they are of all ages, and of every country. They have distinguished themselves both in the cabinet and in the field, and obtained high honors for their knowledge of the sciences. It is easy to gain access to them, for they are always at my service, and I admit them to my company, and dismiss them from it whenever I please. They are never troublesome, but immediately answer every question I ask them. Some relate to me the events of the past ages while others reveal to me the secrets of nature. Some teach me how to live, and others how to die. Some, by their vivacity, drive away my cares and exhilarate my spirits, while others give fortitude to my mind, and teach me the important lesson how to restrain my desires, and to depend wholly on myself. They open to me, in short, the various avenues of all the arts and sciences, and upon their information I safely rely in all emergencies." "In my study," quaintly said Sir William Waller, "I am sure to converse with none but wise men; but abroad it is impossible for me to avoid the society of fools." Sir John Herschel called books "the best society in every period of history:" "Were I to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me during life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making him a happy man; unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books. You place him in contact with the best society in every period of history—with the wisest, the wittiest, the tenderest, the bravest, and the purest characters who have adorned humanity. You make him a denizen of all nations, a contemporary of all ages. The world has been created for him." Among his books, William Ellery Channing could say: "In the best

books great men talk to us, with us, and give us their most precious thoughts. Books are the voices of the distant and the dead. Books are the true levellers. They give to all who will faithfully use them the society and the presence of the best and greatest of our race. No matter how poor I am; no matter though the prosperous of my own time will not enter my obscure dwelling, if learned men and poets will enter and take up their abode under my roof, if Milton will cross my threshold to sing to me of Paradise; and Shakespeare open to me the world of imagination and the workings of the human heart; and Franklin enrich me with his practical wisdom—I shall not pine for want of intellectual companionship, and I may become a cultivated man, though excluded from what is called the best society in the place where I live. . . . Nothing can supply the place of books. They are cheering and soothing companions in solitude, illness, or affliction. The wealth of both continents could not compensate for the good they impart. Let every man, if possible, gather some good books under his roof, and obtain access for himself and family to some social library. Almost any luxury should be sacrificed to this." One cannot wonder that Fenelon said: "If the crowns of all the kingdoms of the Empire were laid down at my feet in exchange for my books and my love of reading, I would spurn them all;" or that the historian Gibbon wrote: "A taste for books is the pleasure and glory of my life. I would not exchange it for the glory of the Indies."

All these words of wise readers show that he who rightly cultivates the reading habit can not only have the best of friends ever at hand, but can at length say with all modesty, if he reads aright and remembers well: "My mind to me a kingdom is."

WHAT BOOKS TO READ.

"What books shall I read?" This question virtually includes in its answer the consideration of the whole world of letters, and is of such manifest importance that no individual utterance, however sincere and competent, can entirely cover the ground. Different tastes and needs call for different suggestions. In this chapter, therefore, I

prefer to express my own conclusions principally in the words of mightier men.

Coming thus definitely to the choice of particular books, we find that only the smaller and pettier guides presume to mark out definite courses of reading. The master minds never forget that books were made for readers, not readers for books. "The best rule of reading," says Emerson, "will be a method from nature, and not a mechanical one of hours and pages. It holds each student to a pursuit of his native aim, instead of a desultory miscellany. Let him read what is proper to him, and not waste his memory on a crowd of mediocrities. As whole nations have derived their culture from a single book—as the Bible has been the literature as well as the religion of large portions of Europe—as Hafiz was the eminent genius of the Persians, Confucius of the Chinese, Cervantes of the Spaniards; so, perhaps, the human mind would be a gainer, if all the secondary writers were lost—say, in England, all but Shakespeare, Milton, and Bacon—through the profounder study so drawn to those wonderful minds. With this pilot of his own genius, let the student read one, or let him read many, he will read advantageously."

This advantage of following the common consent of the best critics as to what are the world's best books, is further pressed by Mr. Emerson when he urges us to "be sure to read no mean books;" and when, in more definite language, he lays down his three well-known rules: "1. Never read any book that is not a year old. 2. Never read any but famed books. 3. Never read any but what you like; or, in Shakespeare's phrase:

> "No profit goes where is no pleasure ta'en;
> In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

The first of these rules is clearly not to be followed in every case. It is, indeed, modified by the third rule, which must sometimes take precedence of it. But there can be no question that the great majority of readers are in vastly more danger of wasting their time over books that are too new, than of losing sight of contemporary literature through too exclusive a devotion to the standard books of past ages.

Carlyle says that all books are to be divided into two

classes, sheep and goats. "Readers are not aware of the fact," he says, "but a fact it is of daily increasing magnitude, and already of terrible importance to readers, that their first grand necessity in reading is to be vigilantly, conscientiously select; and to know everywhere that books, like human souls, are actually divided into what we may call sheep and goats—the latter put inexorably on the left hand of the judge; and tending, every goat of them, at all moments, whither we know, and much to be avoided, and, if possible, ignored by all sane creatures.

Thoreau expressed the same thought more bombastically, but not more forcibly, when he said: "Read not the Times; read the Eternities." Ruskin further and more minutely marks the same distinction by noting the difference between books of the hour, and books of all time. "All books," says he, "are divisible into two classes, the books of the hour, and the books of all time. Mark this distinction—it is not one of quality only. It is not merely the bad book that does not last, and the good one that does. It is a distinction of species. There are good books for the hour, and good books for all time; bad books for the hour, and bad ones for all time. I must define the two kinds before I go further. The good books of the hour, then—I do not speak of the bad ones—is simply the useful or pleasant talk of some person whom you cannot otherwise converse with, printed for you. . . . These bright accounts of travels; good-humored and witty discussions of questions; lively or pathetic story-telling in the form of novel; firm fact-telling by the real agents concerned in the events of passing history; all these books of the hour, multiplying among us as education becomes more general, are a peculiar characteristic and possession of the present age; we ought to be entirely thankful for them, and entirely ashamed of ourselves if we make no good use of them. But we make the worst possible use, if we allow them to usurp the place of true books; for, strictly speaking, they are not books at all, but merely letters or newspapers in good print. Our friend's letter may be delightful, or necessary, to-day: whether worth keeping or not, is to be considered. The newspaper may be entirely proper at breakfast time; but assuredly it is not reading for all day. So, though bound up in a volume, the long letter which gives you so pleasant an account

of the inns, and roads, and weather last year at such a place, or which tells you that amusing story, or gives you the real circumstances of such and such events, however valuable for occasional reference, may not be, in the real sense of the word, a "book" at all, nor, in the real sense, to be "read." A book is essentially not a talked thing, but a written thing; and written, not with the view of mere communication, but of permanence. The book of talk is printed only because its author cannot speak to thousands of people at once; if he could, he would—the volume is mere *multiplication* of his voice. You cannot talk to your friend in India; if you could, you would; you write instead: that is mere *conveyance* of voice. But a book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to preserve it. The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one has yet said it; so far as he knows, no one else can say it; he is bound to say it, clearly and melodiously if he may, clearly, at all events. In the sum of his life he finds this to be the thing, or group of things, manifest to him; this the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down forever; engrave it on rock, if he could; saying, 'This is the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved, and hated, like another; my life was as the vapor, and is not; but this I saw and knew: this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory." That is his 'writing;' it is, in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription, or Scripture. That is a 'Book.'"

Mr. Ruskin thus makes clear the fact that the real value of any book, to a particular reader, is to be measured by its serviceableness to that reader. "There is a literature of knowledge, and a literature of power," says DeQuincey; and knowledge that can never be transmuted into power, becomes mere intellectual rubbish. The choice of books would be greatly aided, if the reader, in taking up a volume, would always ask himself just why he is going to read it, and of what service it is to be to him. This question, if sincerely put, and truthfully answered, is pretty sure to lead him to the great books—or at least to the books that are great for him.

Homer, Plutarch, Herodotus, and Plato; Virgil, Livy, and Tacitus; Dante, Tasso, and Petrarch; Cervantes; Thomas à Kempis; Goethe and Shiller; Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, Bunyan, Addison, Gray, Scott, and Wordsworth; Hawthorne, Emerson, Motley, Longfellow, Bryant, Lowell, Holmes, and Whittier—he who reads these, and such as these, is not in serious danger of spending his time amiss. But not even such a list as this is to be received as a necessity by every reader. One may find Cowper more profitable than Wordsworth; to another, the reading of Bancroft may be more advantageous than that of Herodotus; while a third may gain more immediate and lasting good from great historical novels like Ebers' "Uarda," or Kingsley's "Hypatia," than from a long and patient attempt to master Grote's "History of Greece," or Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Each individual reader must try to determine, first of all, what is the best for himself. In forming this decision let him make the utmost use of the best guides, not forgetting that the average opinion of educated men is pretty sure to be a correct opinion; but let him never put aside his own honesty and individuality. He must choose his books as he chooses his friends, because of their integrity and helpfulness, and because of the pleasure their society gives him.

Mr. Matthew Arnold, not all of whose advice is to be implicitly received, well emphasizes the necessity of reading with your highest aims in view, when he says: "The poor require culture as much as the rich; and at present their education, even when they get education, gives them hardly anything of it; yet hardly less of it, perhaps, than the education of the rich gives to the rich. For when we say that culture is, *To know the best that has been thought and said in the world*, we imply that, for culture, a system directly tending to this end is necessary in our reading. Now there is no such system yet present to guide the reading of the rich, any more than of the poor. Such a system is hardly even thought of; a man who wants it must make it for himself. And our reading being so without purpose as it is, nothing can be truer than what Butler says, that really, in general, no part of our time is more idly spent than the time spent in reading. Still,

culture is indispensably necessary, and culture implies reading; but reading with a purpose to guide it, and with system. He does a good work who does anything to help this; indeed, it is the one essential service now to be rendered to education. And the plea that this or that man has no time for culture will vanish as soon as we desire culture so much that we begin to examine seriously our present use of our time."

"Every book that we take up without a purpose," says Mr. Frederick Harrison, "is an opportunity lost of taking up a book with a purpose—every bit of stray information which we cram into our heads without any sense of its importance, is for the most part a bit of the most useful information driven out of our heads and choked off from our minds. It is so certain that information, that is, the knowledge, the stored thoughts and observations of mankind, is now grown to proportions so utterly incalculable and prodigious, that even the learned whose lives are given to study can but pick up some crumbs that fall from the table of truth. They delve and tend but a plot in that vast and teeming kingdom, while those whom active life leaves with but a few cramped hours of study can hardly come to know the very vastness of the field before them; or how infinitesimally small is the corner they can traverse at the best. We know all is not of equal value. We know that books differ in value as much as diamonds differ from the sand on the seashore, as much as our living friend differs from a dead rat. We know that much in the myriad-peopled world of books—very much in all kinds—is trivial, enervating, inane, even noxious. And thus, where we have infinite opportunities of wasting our efforts to no end, of fatiguing our minds without enriching them, of clogging the spirit without satisfying it, there, I cannot but think, the very infinity of opportunities is robbing us of the actual power of using them. And thus I come often, in my less hopeful moods, to watch the remorseless cataract of daily literature which thunders over the remnants of the past, as if it were a fresh impediment to the men of our day in the way of systematic knowledge and consistent powers of thought: as if wit were destined one day to overwhelm the great inheritance of mankind in prose and verse."

A reader who is ever seeking for a book that shall not

only be helpful in some sense, but helpful in a high sense, is not likely to waste his time over that which is merely respectable instead of that which is really great. "I am not presumptuous enough," says Mr. Harrison further, "to assert that the larger part of modern literature is not worth reading in itself, that the prose is not readable, entertaining, one may say highly instructive. Nor do I pretend that the verses which we read so zealously in place of Milton's are not good verses. On the contrary, I think them sweetly conceived, as musical and as graceful as the verse of any age in our history. I say it emphatically, a great deal of our modern literature is such that it is exceedingly difficult to resist it, and it is undeniable that it gives us real information. It seems perhaps unreasonable to many, to assert that a decent readable book which gives us actual instruction can be otherwise than a useful companion, and a solid gain. I dare say many people are ready to cry out upon me as an obscurantist for venturing to doubt a genial confidence in all literature simply as such. But the question which weighs upon me with such really crushing urgency is this: What are the books that in our little remnant of reading time it is most vital for us to know? For the true use of books is of such sacred value to us that to be simply entertained is to cease to be taught, elevated, inspired by books; merely to gather information of a chance kind is to close the mind to knowledge of the urgent kind."

This union of freedom with authority—of a choice for one's self, and a willingness to believe that the world is right in setting Shakespeare above Swinburne and Homer above Tupper—is, I believe, the true and the only guide in the selecton of books to read. In the long run, nothing but truth, simplicity, purity, and a lofty purpose approves a book to the favor of the ages; and nothing else ought to approve it to the individual reader. Thus the end is reached and the choice is made, not by taking a book because a "course of reading" commands you to do so, but because you come to see for yourself the wisdom of the selection. The pure and wholesome heart of humanity —that thing which we call conscience—is the guide of readers as it is of every other class of workers in life.

In this connection it should be strongly emphasized that nothing is so fatal to sound habits of reading as the

loss of hearty enthusiasm, and the substitution therefor of artificiality and dilettanteism. I cannot better put the wide applicability of this truth, in matters of literature, than by making another long quotation from Mr. Harrison, who is surely to be accounted one of the wisest and most helpful of recent literary counselors. In the passages I have chosen will be found wholesome suggestions on other topics connected with the general subject of reading —a subject which is ever branching out in new directions on this side and on that. "I have no intention," says Mr. Harrison, "to moralize or to indulge in a homily against the reading of what is deliberately evil. There is not so much need for this now, and I am not discoursing on the whole duty of man. I take that part of our reading which is by itself no doubt harmless, entertaining, and even gently instructive. But of this enormous mass of literature how much deserves to be chosen out, to be preferred to all the great books of the world, to be set apart for those precious hours which are all that the most of us can give to solid reading? The vast proportion of books are books that we shall never be able to read. A serious percentage of books are not worth reading at all. The really vital books for us we also know to be a very trifling portion of the whole. And yet we act as if every book were as good as any other, as if it were merely a question of order which we take up first, as if any book were good enough for us, and as if all were alike honorable, precious and satisfying. Alas! books cannot be more than the men who write them, and as a large proportion of the human race now write books, with motives and objects as various as human activity, books as books are entitled *a priori*, until their value is proved, to the same attention and respect as houses, steam-engines, pictures, fiddles, bonnets, and other thoughtful or ornamental products of human industry. In the shelves of those libraries which are our pride, libraries public or private, circulating or very stationary, are to be found those great books of the world, *rari nantes in gurgite va to*, those books which are truly 'the precious life-blood of a master spirit.' But the very familiarity which their mighty fame has bred in us makes us indifferent; we grow weary of what every one is supposed to have read, and we take down something which looks a little eccentric, or some author on the mere ground

that we never heard of him before. . . . How does the trivial, provided it is the new, that which stares at us in the advertising columns of the day, crowd out the immortal poetry and pathos of the human race, vitiating our taste for those exquisite pieces which are a household word, and weakening our mental relish for the eternal works of genius! Old Homer is the very fountain-head of pure poetic enjoyment, of all that is spontaneous, simple, native, and dignified in life. He takes us into the ambrosial world of heroes, of human vigor, of purity, of grace. Now Homer is one of the few poets the life of whom can be fairly preserved in a translation. Most men and women can say that they have read Homer, just as most of us can say that we have studied Johnson's Dictionary. But how few of us take him up, time after time, with fresh delight! How few have ever read the entire 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' through! Whether in the resounding lines of the old Greek, as fresh and ever-stirring as the waves that tumble on the seashore, filling the soul with satisfying, silent wonder at its restless unison; whether in the quaint lines of Chapman, or the clarion couplets of Pope, or the closer versions of Cowper, Lord Derby, or Philip Worsley, or even in the new prose version of the 'Odyssey,' Homer is always fresh and rich. And yet how seldom does one find a friend spell-bound over the Greek Bible [Homer] of antiquity, while they wade through torrents of magazine quotations from a petty versifier of to-day, and in an idle vacation will graze as contentedly as cattle in a fresh meadow, through the chopped straw of a circulating library. A generation which will listen to 'Pinafore' for three hundred nights, and will read M. Zola's seventeenth romance, can no more read Homer than it could read a cuneiform inscription. It will read about Homer just as it will read about a cuneiform inscription, and will crowd to see a few pots which probably came from the neighborhood of Troy. But to Homer and the primeval type of heroic man in his beauty, and his simpleness, and joyousness, the cultured generation is really dead, as completely as some spoiled beauty of the ballroom is dead to the bloom of the heather or the waving of the daffodils in a glade. It is a true psychological problem, this nausea which idle culture seems to produce for all that is manly and pure in heroic poetry. One

knows—at least every schoolboy has known—that a passage of Homer, rolling along in the hexameter or trumped out by Pope, will give one a hot glow of pleasure and raise a finer throb in the pulse; one knows that Homer is the easiest, most artless, most diverting of all poets; that the fiftieth reading rouses the spirit even more than the first —and yet we find ourselves (we are all alike) painfully psha-ing over some new and uncut barley-sugar in rhyme, which a man in the street asked us if we had read; or it may be some learned lucubration about the site of Troy, by some one we chanced to meet at dinner. It is an unwritten chapter in the history of the human mind, how this literary prurience after new print unmans us for the enjoyment of the old songs chanted forth in the sunrise of human imagination. To ask a man or woman who spends half a lifetime in sucking magazines and new poems to read a book of Homer, would be like asking a butcher's boy to whistle 'Adelaida.' The noises and sights and talk, the whirl and volatility of life around us, are too strong for us. A society which is forever gossiping in a sort of perpetual 'drum,' loses the very faculty of caring for anything but 'early copies' and the last tale out. Thus, like the tares in the noble parable of the Sower, a perpetual chatter about books chokes the seed which is sown in the greatest books in the world. I speak of Homer, but fifty other great poets and creators of eternal beauty would serve my argument as well.

"Take the latest, perhaps, in the series of the world-wide and immortal poets of the whole human race—Walter Scott. We all read Scott's romances, as we have all read Hume's 'History of England,' but how often do we read them, how zealously, with what sympathy and understanding? I am told that the last discovery of modern culture is that Scott's prose is commonplace; that the young men at our universities are far too critical to care for his artless sentences and flowing descriptions. They prefer Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Mallock, and the euphuism of young Oxford, just as some people prefer a Dresden Shepherdess to the Caryatides of the Erictheum, pronounce Fielding to be low, and Mozart to be *passé*. As boys love lollypops, so these juvenile fops love to roll phrases about under the tongue, as if phrases, in themselves, had a value apart from thoughts, feelings, great conceptions, or human

sympathy. For Scott is just one of the poets (we may call poets all the great creators in prose or in verse) of whom one never wearies, just as one can listen to Beethoven or watch the sunrise or the sunset day by day, with new delight. I think I can read the 'Antiquary,' or the 'Bride of Lammermoor,' 'Ivanhoe,' 'Quentin Durward,' and 'Old Mortality,' at least once a year afresh. Now Scott is a perfect library in himself. . . . If I say of Scott, that to have drunk in the whole of his glorious spirit is a liberal education in itself, I am asking for no exclusive devotion to Scott, to any poet, to any school of poets, or any age, or any country, to any style or any order of poets, one more than another. They are as various, fortunately, and as many-sided, as human nature itself. If I delight in Scott, I love Fielding, and Richardson, and Sterne, and Goldsmith, and Defoe. Yes, and I will add Cooper and Marryat, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen —to confine myself to those who are already classics, to our own country, and to one form of art alone, and not to venture on the ground of contemporary romance in general. . . . Let us all beware lest worship of the idiosyncrasy of our peerless Shakespeare blind us to the value of the great masters who in a different world and with different aims have presented the development of civilization in a series of dramas, where the unity of a few great types of man and of society is made paramount to subtlety of character or brilliancy of language. . . . Nor let us forget those wonderful idealizations of awakening thought and primitive societies, the pictures of other races and types of life removed from our own: all those primeval legends, ballads, songs, and tales, those proverbs, apologues, and maxims, which have come down to us from distant ages of man's history. . . . I protest that I am devoted to no school in particular: I condemn no school; I reject none. I am for the school of all the great men; and I am against the school of the smaller men."

Has it not been made clear, in the words of thoughtful counselors, by which, in this chapter, I have sought to strengthen and make plain my own sincerest convictions concerning the proper selection of books, that the reader must always search for—

Books that are wholesome;

Books that are helpful to him personally;

and that, if by following these rules, he does not find that his choice usually falls upon books which the greatest minds call great, the fault is more likely to be in himself than in them.

THE BEST TIME TO READ.

In the choice of the time for reading, as in that of the books to read, large liberty must be given to individual needs and habits. There is no hour of the twenty-four which may not, under certain circumstances, be profitably spent in reading. In the lonely watches of a sleepless night, in the precious hours of early morning, in the busy forenoon, the leisurely afternoon, or in the long winter evenings—whenever the time and inclination comes, that is your time for reading. If the inclination does not come with the time, if the mind is weary, and the attention hard to fix, then it is better to lose that special time so far as reading is concerned, and to take up something else. A much shorter time chosen under more favorable circumstances—if it is only five minutes in a busy day—will more than make up your loss.

Everybody has *some* time to read, however much else he may have to do. Many a woman has read to excellent purpose while mixing bread, or waiting for the meat to brown, or tending the baby, simply by reading a sentence when she could. Men have become learned at the blacksmith's forge, or the printer's case, or behind the counter. No time is too short, and no occupation is too mean, to be made to pay tribute to a real desire for knowledge. I know of a woman who read "Paradise Lost," and two or three other standard works, aloud to her husband in a single winter, while he was shaving, that being the only available time. "There is no business, no avocation whatever," says Wyttenbach, "which will not permit a man, who has an inclination, to give a little time, every day, to the studies of his youth;" and this truth is equally applicable to the studies taken up in middle life or old age "While you stand deliberating which book your son shall read first, another boy has read both; read anything five hours a day, and you will soon be learned;" said Dr. Johnson. Five hours a day is a large amount of time,

but five minutes a day, spent over good books, will give a man a great deal of knowledge worth having, before a year is out. It is the time thus spent that counts for more to one's intellectual self than all the rest of the day occupied in mere manual labor. "There is nothing in the recollections of my childhood," says Mary C. Ware, "that I look back upon with so much pleasure as the reading aloud my books to my mother. She was then a woman of many cares, and in the habit of engaging in every variety of household work. Whatever she might be doing in kitchen, or dairy, or parlor, she was always ready to listen to me, and to explain whatever I did not understand. There was always with her an undercurrent of thought about other things, mingling with all her domestic duties, lightening and modifying them but never leading her to neglect them, or to perform them imperfectly. I believe it is to this trait of her character that she owes the elasticity and ready social sympathy that still animates her under the weight of almost four score years."

There is need of a constant economy in the choice of time for reading, be it much or little. "It is true," says Philip Gilbert Hamerton, "that the most absolute master of his own hours still needs thrift if he would turn them to account, and that too many *never* learn this thrift, while others learn it late." Nor is it only those whose pursuits are not distinctly literary who fail to make the best use of the passing hours. "Few intellectual men," says Mr. Hamerton, "have the art of economizing the hours of study. The very necessity, which every one acknowledges, of giving vast portions of life to attain proficiency in anything, makes us prodigal where we ought to be parsimonious, and careless where we have need of unceasing vigilance. The best time-savers are a love of soundness in all we learn or do, and a cheerful acceptance of inevitable limitations. There is a certain point of proficiency at which an acquisition begins to be of use, and unless we have the time and resolution necessary to reach that point, our labor is as completely thrown away as that of the mechanic who began to make an engine but never finished it. Each of us has acquisitions which remain permanently unavailable from their unsoundness: a language or two that we can neither speak nor write, a science of which the elements have not been mastered, an art

which we cannot practice with satisfaction either to others or to ourselves. Now the time spent on these unsound accomplishments has been in great measure wasted; not quite absolutely wasted, since the mere labor of trying to learn has been a discipline for the mind, but wasted so far as the accomplishments themselves are concerned. And this mental discipline, on which so much stress is laid by those whose interest it is to encourage unsound accomplishment, might be obtained more perfectly if the subjects of study were less numerous and more thoroughly understood."

We are not to understand from this that nothing is to be studied with which we do not intend to become profoundly acquainted, for much knowledge must of necessity be fragmentary and incomplete. This judicious adviser is merely warning us against purposeless intellectual trifling. "Too many readers," says Mr. J. B. Braithwaite, "allow their moments of leisure to be wasted in a kind of 'busy idleness;' they look over a great variety of books, but for want of settled diligence, their unsteady wanderings in prose or poetry are attended with no satisfactory result. There is a yet larger class of listless triflers, who give way to lounging and indolent habits of mind, wholly unworthy of intelligent and responsible beings. If they take up a book after the labors of the day, it is too often a feeble attempt to think, as it were, by proxy; and even this seems, not unfrequently, too great an exertion, and the future can alone fully disclose how many are the precious hours, now never to be recalled, which have been thoughtlessly trifled away over a newspaper, a review, or other publication of the day, with scarcely an object besides that of whiling away the time. For these and many other kindred evils there is no remedy more efficacious than a sound and healthy *purpose*, rightly directed, and steadily maintained. This is the magnet that can discover and gather to itself, even from the dust, the scattered particles within the range of its attraction. With this all our reading will be improved to the greatest advantage; while without it the perusal of the best books will be desultory and comparatively unimproving; the best materials may be collected, but they will be in rude heaps that incumber, rather than adorn, the ground. And how great is the danger, where there is no fixed aim, that life may be frit-

tered away in empty and profitless, because purposeless, occupation."

The Germans, who certainly have great results to show for the time they spend in reading and other intellectual pursuits, may profitably teach us two lessons concerning the best time to read: that brain-work should be steady and uninterrupted while it lasts, and that it should be varied by periods of rest and changed employment. "In the charming and precious letters of Victor Jacquement," says Hamerton, "a man whose life was dedicated to culture, and who not only lived for it, but died for it, there is a passage about the intellectual labors of Germans, which takes due account of the expenditure of time." This letter runs as follows: "Being astonished at the prodigious variety and at the extent of knowledge possessed by the Germans, I begged one of my friends, Saxon by birth, and one of the foremost geologists in Europe, to tell me how his countrymen managed to know so many things. Here is his answer, nearly in his own words: 'A German (except myself, who am the idlest of men), gets up early, summer and winter, at about five o'clock. He works four hours before breakfast, sometimes smoking all the time, which does not interfere with his application. His breakfast lasts about half an hour, and he remains, afterward, another half hour talking with his wife and playing with his children. He returns to his work for six hours, dines without hurrying himself, smokes an hour after dinner, playing again with his children, and before he goes to bed he works four hours more. He begins again every day, and never goes out. This is how it comes to pass that Oersted, the greatest natural philosopher in Germany, is at the same time the greatest physician; this is how Kant, the metaphysician, was one of the most learned astronomers in Europe: and how Goethe, who is at present the first and most fertile author in Germany in almost all kinds of literature, is an excellent botanist, mineralogist, and natural philosopher.'" This persistency of the German character evokes grand results from even dull brains, which one would think were steeped in beer and shrivelled by excessive smoking. The advantages of persistency and a "change of words," in the choice of time for brain labor, Mr. Hamerton thus further presses: "The encouraging inference which you may draw from

this in reference to your own case is that, since all intellectual men have had more than one pursuit, you may set off your business against the most absorbing of their pursuits, and the rest be still almost as rich in time as they have been. You may study literature as some painters have studied it, or science as some literary men have studied it. The first step is to establish a regulated economy of your time, so that, without interfering with a due attention to business and to health, you may get two clear hours every day for reading of the best kind. It is not much, some men would tell you it is not enough, but I purposely fix the expenditure of time at a low figure because I want it to be always practicable consistently with all the duties and necessary pleasures of your life. If I told you to read four hours every day, I know beforehand what would be the consequence. You would keep the rule for three or four days, by an effort, then some engagement would occur to break it, and you would have no rule at all. And please observe that the two hours are to be given quite regularly, because, when the time given is not much, regularity is quite essential. Two hours a day, regularly, make more than seven hundred hours in a year, and in seven hundred hours, wisely and uninterruptedly occupied, much may be done in anything. Permit me to insist upon that word *uninterruptedly*. Few people realize the full evil of an interruption, few people know all that is implied by it."

Thus to avoid interruption we may properly separate ourselves at times from the society of our ordinary companions at home or abroad, when such separation is essential to sound reading and thinking. I do not mean that this separation should be carried, as it too often is, to positive discourtesy and selfishness. Sometimes the best possible hour for reading is that spent over books with husband or wife or friend. But as between time well spent with books, and time foolishly spent in "society," there can be no doubt as to the proper choice. Readers must give up something, and that something often proves to be an undue devotion to the customs and rules of fashionable social intercourse, than which there is no more formidable foe to the reading habit.

"There is a degree of incompatibility," Mr. Hamerton says further, "between the fashionable and the intellectual

lives, which makes it necessary, at a certain time, to choose one or the other as our own. There is no hostility, there need not be any uncharitable feeling on one side or the other, but there must be a resolute choice between the two. If you decide for the intellectual life, you will incur a definite loss to set against your gain. Your existence may have calmer and profounder satisfactions, but it will be less amusing, and even in an appreciable degree less *human;* less in harmony, I mean, with the common instincts and feelings of humanity. For the fashionable world, although decorated by habits of expense, has enjoyment for its object, and arrives at enjoyment by those methods which the experience of generations have proved most efficacious. Variety of amusement, frequent change of scenery and society, healthy exercise, pleasant occupation of the mind without fatigue—these things do indeed make existence agreeable to human nature, and the science of living agreeably is better understood in the fashionable society of England than by laborious students and *savants.* The life led by that society is the true heaven of the natural man, who likes to have frequent feasts and a hearty appetite, who enjoys the varying spectacle of wealth, and splendor, and pleasure, who loves to watch, from the Olympus of his personal ease, the curious results of labor in which he takes no part, the interesting ingenuity of the toiling world below. In exchange for these varied pleasures of the spectator, the intellectual life can offer you but one satisfaction; for all its promises are reducible simply to this, that you shall come at last, after infinite labor, into contact with some great *reality*—that you shall know, and do in such sort, that you will feel yourself on firm ground and be recognized, probably not much applauded, but yet recognized—as a fellow-laborer by other knowers and doers. Before you come to this, most of your present accomplishments will be abandoned by yourself as unsatisfactory and insufficient, but one or two of them will be turned to better account, and will give you after many years a tranquil self-respect, and, what is still rarer and better, a very deep and earnest reverence for the greatness which is above you. Severed from the vanities of the illusory, you will live with the realities of knowledge, as one who has quitted the painted scenery of the theater to listen by the eternal ocean or gaze at the granite hills."

From all that has been said, the reader has seen how closely the best *choice* of time for reading is connected with the best *use* of that time. If we devote to books the hours or the minutes we can catch, and choose our reading with a full sense of the wideness of the field of selection and the narrowness of the time in which we can work in that field, we shall hardly go astray in our decision.

HOW MUCH TO READ.

The amount which it is advisable for one to read can no more be settled off-hand, in a general way, than the quantity of his food or the proper limit of his physical exercise. Tastes, necessities and opportunities differ; some persons can undoubtedly read very much faster than others, and yet get as much profit from their reading. And it is hardly necessary to say that a novel is "quicker reading" than a history of Greece; or that a clever bit of *vers-de-société* need not occupy the mind so long as a passage of equal length from Milton or Homer. Then, again, a clear and luminous writer like Longfellow does not delay the reader in such a way as an obscure and artificial poet like Robert Browning. In general terms, one has passed the proper limit of reading when he reads without suitable apprehension, and understanding, and promise of retention in memory, of the page before him, whether it be novel or history, humorous poem or didactic verse. "Reading with me incites to reflection instantly," says Mr. Beecher; "I cannot separate the origination of ideas from the reception of ideas; the consequence is, as I read I always begin to think in various directions, and that makes my reading slow." Dugald Stewart thus emphasizes this duty of thoughtfulness in reading: "Nothing, in truth, has such a tendency to weaken, not only the powers of invention, but the intellectual powers in general, as a habit of extensive and various reading without reflection. The activity and force of the mind are gradually impaired in consequence of disuse; and, not unfrequently, all our principles and opinions come to be lost in the infinite multiplicity and discordancy of our acquired ideas." John Locke tells us, in homely but sensible phrase, that "Those who have read of everything are thought to

understand everything too; but it is not always so. Reading furnishes the mind only with the materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours. We are of the ruminating kind, and it is not enough to cram ourselves with a great load of collections; unless we chew them over again, they will not give us strength and nourishment." Professor W. P. Atkinson thus enforces the same lesson: "The most important question for the good student and reader is not, amid this multitude of books which no man can number, how much he shall read. The really important questions are, first, what is the quality of what he does read; and, second, what is his manner of reading it. There is an analogy which is more than accidental between physical and mental assimilation and digestion; and, homely as the illustration may seem, it is the most forcible I can use. Let two sit down to a table spread with food: one possessed of a healthy appetite, and knowing something of the nutritious qualities of the various dishes before him; the other cursed with a pampered and capricious appetite, and knowing nothing of the results of chemical and physiological investigation. One shall make a better meal, and go away stronger and better fed, on a dish of oatmeal, than the other on a dinner that has half emptied his pockets. Shall we study physiologial chemistry and know all about what is food for the body, and neglect mental chemistry, and be utterly careless as to what nutriment is contained in the food we give our minds? I am not speaking here of vicious literature: we don't spread our tables with poisons. I speak only of the varying amount of *nutritive matter* contained in books." J. B. Braithwaite, another American writer on this topic, whose honest conservatism and wholesome strictness well entitle his words to the attention of readers, declares: "The mind requires nourishing food. Trifling reading enfeebles it." Lord Bacon wisely says: "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. This is the great secret both of reading to profit, and of making the best choice of what we read. If books were more commonly judged by their real weight, how many popular works would at once shrink into insignificance! It is melancholy to think of the millions of immortal minds, that accustom

themselves to reading, which when weighed in the balance is found to contain little less than the lightness of vanity. How many that might have attained the stature of full grown men have thus become enervated, dwarfish, deformed, or crippled. With desires formed for the highest enjoyments, and understandings capable of the noblest improvement, the reading of trifling and pernicious books, the habit of mental association with low, mean and unworthy thoughts, has prostrated the energies of thousands, and debased them below themselves."

Coleridge concluded, in speaking of such frivolous and make-believe attention of unworthy readers to unworthy books: "Some readers are like the hourglass—their reading is as the sand. It runs in and runs out, but leaves not a vestige behind. Some like a sponge, which imbibes everything, and returns it in the same state, only a little dirtier. Some like a jelly bag, which allows all that is pure to pass away, and retains only the refuse and dregs. The fourth class may be compared to the slave of Golconda, who, casting away all that is worthless, preserves only the pure gems." The usefulness of books lies not only in themselves but in the mind of the reader. Petrarch says: "Books have brought some men to knowledge, and some to madness. As fullness sometimes hurteth the stomach more than hunger, so fareth it with wits, and, as of meats, so likewise of books, the use ought to be limited according to the quality of him that useth them."

"To stuff our minds with what is simply trivial, simply curious, or that which at best has but a low nutritive power," says Frederick Harrison, "this is to close our minds to what is solid and enlarging and spiritually sustaining. . . . I think the habit of reading wisely is one of the most difficult habits to acquire, needing strong resolution and infinite pains; and I hold the habit of reading for mere reading's sake instead of for the sake of the stuff we gain from reading, to be one of the worst and commonest and most unwholesome habits we have. Why do we still suffer the traditional hypocrisy about the dignity of literature, literature I mean in the gross, which includes about equal parts of what is useful and what is useless? Why are books as books, writers as writers, readers as readers, meritorious and honorable, apart from any good in them, or anything that we can get from

them? Why do we pride ourselves on our powers of absorbing print, as our grandfathers did on their gifts in imbibing port, when we know that there is a mode of absorbing print which makes it impossible we can ever learn anything good out of books? Our stately Milton said in a passage which is one of the watchwords of the English race, 'as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book.' But has he not also said that he would 'have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves as well as men, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors?' Yes! they do kill the good book who deliver up their few and precious hours of reading to the trivial book; they make it dead for them; they do what lies in them to destroy 'the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life;' they 'spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books.' For in the wilderness of books most men, certainly all busy men, *must* strictly choose. If they saturate their minds with the idler books, the 'good book,' which Milton calls 'an immortality rather than a life,' is dead to them; it is a book sealed up and buried."

And just here, even at the risk of repeating what has been said before, in this series of chapters, I want to quote some words of the German pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer: "It is the case with literature as with life; wherever we turn we come upon the incorrigible mob of humankind, whose name is Legion, swarming everywhere, damaging everything, as flies in summer. Hence the multiplicity of bad books, those exuberant weeds of literature which choke the true corn. Such books rob the public of time, money, and attention, which ought properly to belong to good literature and noble aims, and they are written with a view merely to make money or occupation. They are therefore not merely useless, but injurious. Nine-tenths of our current literature has no other end but to inveigle a thaler or two out of the public pocket, for which purpose author, publisher, and printer are leagued together. A more pernicious, subtler, and bolder piece of trickery is that by which penny-a-liners and scribblers succeed in destroying good taste and real culture. . . . Hence, the paramount importance of acquiring the art *not* to read; in other words, if not reading such books as occupy the public mind, or even those

which make a noise in the world, and reach several editions in their first and last years of existence. We should recollect that he who writes for fools finds an enormous audience, and we should devote the ever scant leisure of our circumscribed existence to the master spirits of all ages and nations, those who tower over humanity, and whom the voice of Fame proclaims; only such writers cultivate and instruct us. Of bad books we can never read too little; of the good never too much. The bad are intellectual poison and undermine the understanding. Because people insist on reading not the best books written for all time, but the newest contemporary literature, writers of the day remain in the narrow circle of the same perpetually revolving ideas, and the age continues to wallow in its own mire. . . . Mere acquired knowledge belongs to us only like a wooden leg and a wax nose. Knowledge attained by means of thinking resembles our natural limbs, and is the only kind that really belongs to us. Hence the difference between the thinker and the pedant. The intellectual possession of the independent thinker is like a beautiful picture which stands before us, a living thing with fitting light and shadow, sustained tones, perfect harmony of color. That of the merely learned man may be compared to a palette covered with bright colors, perhaps even arranged with some system but wanting in harmony, coherence and meaning. . . . Only those writers profit us whose understanding is quicker, more lucid than our own, by whose brain we indeed think for a time; who quicken our thoughts, and lead us whither alone we could not find our way.

When one perceives that he is turning page after page without noting what is printed thereon, without reflecting on the information afforded him, or without knowing why he is reading at all, it is time for him to stop, whether he has read one page or one thousand. We take it for granted, as was urged in a previous chapter, that every wise reader will determine first of all *why* he has chosen a particular book, whether for instruction, or guidance, or warning, or mere amusement. In any case—and this remark applies to books taken up for amusement and recreation, as well as to the gravest history or the most abstruse mathematical treatise—when the book ceases to perform its legitimate function, it is time to lay it down and engage

in some other occupation. "Do not read too much at a time," says Edward E. Hale; "stop when you are tired, and in whatever way make some review of what you read, even as you go along." Here, as in every other division of the general subject, the duty of attention to purpose should ever be borne in mind. If your purpose is to learn, read just long enough to learn; if to rest your mind, read just long enough to do that. When a history becomes a tiresome burden, or a biography but an idle amusement, or a novel a burdensome task, then you may be quite sure that you have read too much.

Some persons read both too much and too little; they handle a great many volumes on a vast number of topics, but having failed to assimilate what they have read, they feel at last the dearth that comes from a dissipation of power. "There is a great deal too much reading at random," says the Boston *Literary World;* "of this book to-day, and of that to-morrow, with no careful method governing the selection, and no high purpose gathering up the results into a definite good. One cannot read all the books that are published; one cannot even know by name the books that have been written; the only possible achievement is to adopt some eclectic system and abide by it rigorously; to do a little reading upon a few choice topics, and do it thoroughly and well." The same adviser goes on to urge that "it is an excellent way to fix upon some epoch in history, or some noted figure in biography, or some important department of science and art; and to govern one's reading by its requirements. Concentrate fact, fiction, and fancy all upon the theme; illuminate all parts of it by every aid that can be brought to bear upon it, and make it a life work to master it in all its aspects and relations. Such a course will give constant interest to a pursuit which even with those who are the fondest of it may sometimes flag; it will economize thought and time; and it will enrich the mind with the best fruits of study." Bishop Potter advises the same method: "Study subjects rather than books; therefore compare different authors on the same subject; the statements of authors, with information collected from other sources, and the conclusions drawn by a writer, with the rules of sound logic." Should one thus regulate his time for intellectual work, he would find that any essential or habitual deviation from this plan

would be, so far as the plan is concerned, a waste of time, and an overplus of reading. If one is determined to read Green's "Short History of the English People," for instance, he is reading too much if he sits up half the night to finish the last novel of Mr. Howells or Thomas Hardy. If, on the other hand, he is preparing for a village reading-club, a careful analysis of the general method of Mr. Howells or Mr. Hardy as a novelist, he will be reading too much if he gives himself a "stint" of two hundred of Mr. Green's pages in a day. What under certain circumstances would be praiseworthy and advantageous, under others would be blameworthy and injurious.

In this connection a word should be said concerning re-reading. Luther says: "All who would study with advantage, in any art whatsoever, ought to betake himself to the reading of some sure and certain books oftentimes over; for to read many books produceth confusion, rather than learning, like as those who dwell everywhere are not anywhere at home." It is well to re-read good books; almost every one has a favorite author or authors, to whom he turns with constant delight and profit, and the habit of a second, or third, or fourth reading of a good book, or chapter of a book, greatly aids the understanding and the memory. But this habit may easily be carried too far. We *must* forget something, much. God has so ordered our mental powers, and it is useless and wicked for us to quarrel with the ordering. Therefore we should not attempt to read a few books constantly, to the entire or virtual neglect of others. There are too many noble volumes that we must leave untouched, at the best. Read carefully and thoughtfully, and re-read wisely; but do not lament unduly over your failures of memory, nor strive to correct it by excessive devotion to one little niche in the wide cathedral of literature.

In closing this chapter of advice concerning the proper amount of reading, strong words of counsel are needed to two classes—those who would cram their own minds and the minds of others, even to the ultimate result of mental and physical injury, insanity, or death; and those on the other extreme, who do not need the least advice concerning the limitation of their reading, for the very good reason that they never read at all.

Of the evils of intellectual cramming, let these grave

words of Herbert Spencer, applicable alike to young and old, speak with unmistakable emphasis: "On old and young the pressure of modern life puts a still-increasing strain. Go where you will, and before long there come under your notice cases of children or youths of either sex more or less injured by undue study. Here, to recover from a state of debility thus produced, a year's rustication has been found necessary. There, you find a chronic congestion of the brain, that has already lasted many months, and threatens to last much longer. Now you hear of a fever that resulted from the over-excitement in some way brought on at school. And again the instance is that of a youth who has already had once to desist from his studies, and who, since he has returned to them, is frequently taken out of his class in a fainting fit. We state facts—facts that have not been sought for, but have been thrust upon our observation during the last two years, and that too within a very limited range. Nor have we by any means exhausted the list. Quite recently we had the opportunity of marking how the evil becomes hereditary, the case being that of a lady of robust parentage whose system was so injured by the regime of a Scotch boarding-school, where she was underfed and overworked, that she invariably suffers from vertigo on rising in the morning, and whose children, inheriting this enfeebled brain, are several of them unable to bear even a moderate amount of study without headache or giddiness. At the present time we have daily under our eyes a young lady whose system has been damaged for life by the college course through which she has passed. Taxed as she was to such an extent that she had no energy left for exercise, she is, now that she has finished her education, a constant complainant. Appetite small and very capricious, mostly refusing meat; extremities perpetually cold, even when the weather is warm; a feebleness which forbids anything but the slowest walking, and that only for a short time; palpitation on going upstairs; greatly impaired vision—these, joined with checked growth and lax tissue, are among the results entailed. And to her case we may add that of her friend and fellow-student, who is similarly weak, who is liable to faint even under the excitement of a quiet party of friends, and who has at length been obliged by her medical attendant to desist from study

entirely. If injuries so conspicuous are thus frequent, how very general must be the smaller and inconspicuous injuries. To one case when positive illness is directly traceable to over-application, there are probably at least half a dozen cases where the evil is unobtrusive and slowly accumulating—cases where there is frequent derangement of the functions, attributed to this or that especial cause, or to constitutional delicacy; cases where there is retardation and premature arrest of bodily growth; cases where a latent tendency to consumption is brought out and established; cases where a predisposition is given to that now common cerebral disorder brought on by the hard work of adult life. How commonly constitutions are thus undermined, will be clear to all who, after noting the frequent ailments of hard-worked professional and mercantile men, will reflect on the disastrous effects which undue application must produce upon the undeveloped systems of the young. The young are competent to bear neither as much hardship, nor as much physical exertion, nor as much mental exertion, as the full grown. Judge, then, if the full grown so manifestly suffer from the exessive mental exertion required of them, how great must be the damage which a mental exertion, often equally excessive, inflicts upon the young!"

And on the other side, I would that these true words of two eminent English educators could at least be road aloud, if no more, in the hearing of those who will not read for themselves. The Rev. R. H. Quick, after quoting the Rev. Mark Pattison's statement that "the dearth of books is only the outward and visible sign of the mental torpor which reigns in those destitute regions"—the middle-class homes of England—goes on to say: "I much doubt if he would find more books in the middle-class homes of the Continent. There is only one kind of reading that is nearly universal—the reading of neswpapers; and the newspaper lacks the element of permanence, and belongs to the domain of talk rather than of literature. Even when we get among the so-called 'educated,' we find that those who care for literature form a very small minority. The rest have of course read Shakespeare and Milton and Walter Scott and Tennyson, but *they do not read them.* The lion's share of our time and thoughts and interests must be given to our business or profession, whatever that may

be; and in few instances is this connected with literature. For the rest, whatever time or thought a man can sparo from his calling is mostly given to his family, or to society, or to some hobby which is not literature. And love of literature is not seen in such reading as is common. The literary spirit shows itself, as I said, in appreciatng beauty of expression; and how far beauty of expression is cared for we may estimate from the fact that few people think of reading anything a second time. The ordinary reader is profoundly indifferent about style, and will not take the trouble to understand ideas. He keeps to periodicals or light fiction, which enables the mind to loll in its easy chair (so to speak), and see pass before it a series of pleasing images. An idea, as Mark Pattison says, is an excitant, comes from mind and calls forth mind; an image is a sedative; and most people, when they take up a book, are seeking a sedative.

REMEMBERING WHAT ONE READS.

Scarcely anything more annoys readers than the fact that they forget so much of what they have read. In history, dates and names pass from the mind; poems that they once knew by heart fade away from recollection; and the characters, the plots, or perhaps the very titles of stories, which were once familiar, depart as utterly as though they had never been known at all.

In connection with this question of the retention or non-retention of what one reads, it should never be forgotten, as was remarked in the preceding chapter, that God has evidently arranged the powers of the human mind in such a way that we *must* forget a great deal, however carefully we strive to remember all we can. A large part of our knowledge, too, is to be considered as nutriment, or as intellectual exercise; and we should no more lament over its loss than because we do not remember what we had for breakfast a year ago to-day, or the exact length of the invigorating walk we took on that breezy morning, week before last. A book is by no means read without profit if a part, or even the whole of it, be forgotten beyond recall. And it is a consolation to reflect that the very best use to which some of our past reading can be

put, is to be forgotten as speedily as possible. If we have forgotten some things that were good and pleasant, we have luckily blotted from our minds not a little that was noxious and unattractive.

But a "poor memory" is a thing that can be materially strengthened; and after all reservations have been made, we should not forget the duty of remembering all we really ought to remember, so far as the natural powers of our minds will permit. The first and the last aid to memory is a habit of paying strict attention to what we read. "Special efforts should be made to *retain* what is gathered from reading," says President Porter, "if any such efforts are required. Some persons read with an interest so wakeful and responsive, and an attention so fixed and energetic, as to need no appliances and no efforts in order to retain what they read. They look upon a page, and it is imprinted upon the memory. . . . But there are others who read only to lose and to forget. Facts and truths, words and thoughts, are alike evanescent. We shall not attempt to explain here the nature of these differences. We are concerned only to devise the remedy: we insist that those who labor under these difficulties should use special appliances to avoid or overcome them. But that upon which we insist most of all, is that what we read we should seek to make our own, only in the manner and after the measure of which we are capable." President Porter then goes on to advise each reader to follow his natural bent and aptitudes; not to worry, if he has not a good verbal memory, over his inability to remember choice phrases or striking stanzas, nor to vex his soul over his failure to retain names and dates. "When a man reads," he says, "he should put himself into the most intimate intercourse with his author, so that all his energies of apprehension, judgment and feeling may be occupied with, and aroused by, what his author furnishes, whatever it may be. If repetition or review will aid him in this, as it often will, let him not disdain or neglect frequent reviews. If the use of the pen, in brief or full notes, in catchwords or other symbols, will aid him, let him not shrink from the drudgery of the pen and the commonplace. . . . But there is no charm or efficacy in such mechanism by itself. It is only valuable as a means to an end, and that end is to quicken the intellectual

energies by arousing and holding the attention." "What a man wants for himself in memory," says a writer in Blackwood's Magazine, "is not a master-power but a servant: the memory that keeps his past of learning and experience alive in him; one recognized not as itself but by results."

Philip Gilbert Hamerton has expressed an opinion that what is called a "defective memory" is by no means an unmixed evil. He says there is such a thing as a "selecting memory, which is not only useful for what it retains, but for what it rejects." What really *interests* us, we can usually retain without recourse to any elaborate system of mnemonics. That which does not properly interest us we cannot thus retain. "Had Goethe been a poor student," says Mr. Hamerton, "bound down to the exclusively legal studies, which did not greatly interest him, it is likely that no one would ever have suspected his immense faculty of assimilation. In this way men who are set by others to load their memories with what is not their proper intellectual food, never get the credit of having any memory at all, and end by themselves believing that they have none. These bad memories are often the best; they are often the selecting memories. They seldom win distinction in examinations; but in literature and art. They are quite incomparably superior to the miscellaneous memories that receive only as boxes and drawers receive what is put into them. A good literary or artistic memory is not like a post office that takes in everything, but like a very well edited periodical which prints nothing that does not harmonize with its intellectual life."

I fully believe in training and disciplining and developing the memory. But I also believe that the very essence of that training is the cultivation of a habit of friendliness, kinship, intimacy, close apprehension toward the printed page; and that it *never* should be reduced to such miserable mnemonic devices as "Barbara," "celerent," "Darii," "felapton"—I remember the words, but I have utterly forgotten what they were designed to help me to remember—by which an "association of ideas" is supposed to be brought to the aid of a treacherous memory. Such devices, says the wise writer from whom I have just quoted, are like tying a frying-pan to one coat-tail and a child's kite to another. The true art of memory is the art of

perceiving the relations and uses of things, not their external characteristics; and above all, not their artificial relations to some essentially foreign object or symbol. The purpose of memory is to help us, when a memory-machine fails to help us, and cumbers and overshadows that which it pretends to aid, it is worse than worthless.

Again, it should be kept in mind that no one brain has a right to tyrannize over another, or to lay down laws for it, in this matter of memory. For instance, I myself remember instinctively, and without the slightest effort, the name of the author, publisher, and printer of whatever book I take in my hand, and also its size, shape, color of binding, and style of typography. Two or three readings of a college catalogue leave upon my mind the surnames, Christian names, and residences of a majority of the persons there recorded. Guide books and city directories are a rest and recreation to me; the names, locations, and pastors of the majority of all the churches in the cities I have visited are retained in mind without effort; and frequently, when visiting a town for the first time, this habit of memory leads me to be considered a local antiquary and specialist. Now these things seem so natural to me, and are acquired so absolutely without effort of any kind, that I can hardly understand why every one else does not remember them equally well. But I have not the slightest right to prescribe a course of guide-books, college catalogues, or city directories for others, any more than they have to demand that I recite Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," or give the dates of the Third Punic War, or the signing of the Magna Charta, or Braddock's defeat, which I remember with as much difficulty as any reader of this chapter. In other words, no one has a right to insist that another person shall remember *as* or *what* he himself remembers. But it should *always* be demanded of every reader that he conscientiously try to strengthen his memory by seeking to understand the nature and purpose of what he reads; its serviceableness to himself, and to the world through him; and its relations to his particular mental constitution and his wise intellectual regimen.

This diversity of memories is admirably stated by Cardinal Newman. "We can," he says, "form an abstract idea of memory, and call it one faculty which has for its sub-

ject matter all past facts of our personal experience; but this is really only an illusion; for there is no such gift of universal memory. Of course we all remember in a way, as we reason, in all subject-matters; but I am speaking of remembering rightly, as I spoke of reasoning rightly. In real facts memory, as a talent, is not one indivisible faculty, but a power of retaining and recalling the past in this or that department of our experience, not in any whatever. Two memories, which are both specially retentive, may also be incommensurate. Some men can recite the canto of a poem, or good part of a speech, after once reading it, but have no head for dates. Others have great capacity for the vocabulary of languages, but recollect nothing of the small occurrences of the day or year. Others never forget any statement which they have read, and can give volume and page, but have no memory for faces. I have known those who could, without effort, run through the succession of days on which Easter fell for years back; or could say where they were, or what they were doing, on a given day in a given year; or could recollect the Christian names of friends and strangers; or could enumerate in exact order the names on all the shops from Hyde Park corner to the Bank; or had so mastered the University Calendar as to be able to bear an examination in the academical history of any M.A. taken at random. And I believe in most of these cases the talent, in its exceptional character, did not extend beyond several classes of subjects. There are a hundred memories as there are a hundred virtues."

THE USE OF NOTE-BOOKS.

A separate chapter on the use of note-books would hardly be necessary, in this series of papers on right methods of reading, were it not that many people so misapprehend the real service of note-books and make them a burden rather than a help. Note-books, like all other aids to reading, and reflection, and the utilization of knowledge, should be valued for the true assistance they may render, and for that alone. But it very often happens that one who is beginning to read comes to the conclusion that method in reading, especially in the preserva-

tion of its results, is the one thing essential, and that nothing is so useful, toward this end, as an elaborate note-book system. Therefore he purchases a large alphabetized blank-book, and having begun to read "Taine's English Literature," let us say, he makes elaborate entries of matters contained in the first few chapters. But as his note-book must also record everything that impresses him as likely to have any future usefulness, he sets down with equal painstaking the leading points of an article in the last Atlantic Monthly, or copies entire an interesting paragraph from the Springfield Republican. After a few days, or perhaps weeks, he finds it inconvenient to hunt up note-book, pen, and ink, every time he takes a volume in his hand, and so he gradually lessens the number of entries; thus the book soon becomes an unserviceable and unused chronicle of a few straggling facts—to be remanded to the closet-shelf, or to be cut up, at last, for scribbling paper. In the end, such a note-book becomes a weight and an incumbrance upon the reading habit, rather than a helper to it.

A note-book, then, should be started upon a plan too modest rather than too ambitious, and should never be allowed to get above the humble place of a servant. One little blank-book, costing a dime, is far more useful, if employed only for the entry of important references or memoranda, and such only, than the most elaborate index *rerum* or commonplace book, if made too cumbersome to be of real serivce. And it is generally true that a note-book should follow the reading habit rather than precede it. If you have not done something toward filling your brain first, do not expect to make up the deficiency by your note-book entries.

Some readers and writers make little use of note-books and some find them extremely serviceable. Mr. W. A. Hovey, the editor of the Boston Evening Transcript, says in one of his "Causerie" papers: "The brain is the best and most reliable memorandum book; it is always at hand; use enlarges its capacity and increases its usefulness and reliability, and no one can read it but its owner." I must say that for one, I quite agree with Mr. Hovey; finding all sorts of memorandum books of little use to me, and employing nothing more than the most inexpensive pocket blank-books, to be torn up when their usefulness has

passed; or now and then a series of envelopes, with their special subjects written upon them. But in this matter it is especially true that no one reader can lay down the law for another. Some of the wisest of American authors have pursued to the fullest extent the plan of using note-books all their lives, and with admirable results. Mr. Emerson's note-books are famous the world over, and it is said, doubtless with entire truth, that some of his most enowned essays are little more than transcripts of them. His entries of course include his own conclusions and reflections as well as those of others. It was my good fortune to be permitted to see, some years ago, the remarkable and substantially similar methods by which two other American authors—Mr. A. Bronson Alcott and the Rev. Dr. Ray Palmer—have preserved well-nigh the entire body of the letters they have received in the whole course of their literary lives. In both cases these valuable libraries of correspondence reach to a long file of volumes; and Mr. Alcott has combined with his a diary of each day's events for a lifetime. Such collections as these are in a true sense monumental, and amount, at length, to valuable contributions to the intellectual history of the time. The Rev. Joseph Cook's note-book system is also worthy of mention here. Mr. Cook uses newspaper cuttings freely, but it should be remarked that he follows strictly the habit of throwing away what he does not really want, and of making his memoranda in the simplest manner, with a view to use only. Mr. Cook extends his annotations to his bound volumes. "I have learned," he says, "to rely on the margins of the books that I read as being themselves my best note-books. Of course I am speaking now only of the volumes which are my own property. These I am perhaps scandalously free in marking, and so every ordinary volume that I have in my library becomes a note-book." Mr. Cook marks three grades of praise on the outside margins of his books, and three of blame on the inside margins. Mr. Beecher does not use note-books himself, but advises young men to get into the habit of using them. "The great point," says he, "is to read nothing without reflection," and with this the Concord philosophers, the sacred poet, and the religio-scientific lecturer would fully agree.

The late William B. Reed, one of the best American

writers of purely literary essays, says of the right use of printed quotation books what is in large part applicable to written ones: "As in every house, we are told, there is a skeleton, and in every doctor's shop a case of instruments for emergencies, mysteriously veiled from vulgar gaze, so in all libraries, and especially if it be one of a writer or public speaker, are there corners where are put away for convenient use, not only commonplace books, happily out of date, but indexes *rerum*, and "Burton's Anatomy," and "Murray's Handbooks for Geographical Illustration," and lexicons and concordances (all honors to those immortal C's, Cruden and Mrs. Cowden Clarke), a thesaurus or two and finally "dictionaries of quotations." It depends very much upon their nature whether such dictionaries are good or bad. The young student uses them, and for this end they were first devised, to furnish him with quotations with which to garnish what he writes, and show his scholarship. This is spurious. It is, the poet tells us, the page of knowledge which is 'rich with the spoils of time.' It is out of the depths of a full mind that bright literary illustrations bubble up to the surface and any critical eye can detect without fail a got-up quotation, or one which a mere dictionary supplies. Not so the 'dictionary,' as it were, which aids memory, and, given a fragment or sometimes even a word, enables the scholar to find the context. They are not merely valuable, but, as auxiliaries, they are essential to complete literary work." So it is with written note-books; they cannot take the place of thought; but they can strengthen and arm it."

Professor W. P. Atkinson, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, speaks warmly of the use of note-books, in his published lecture on reading. "I cannot close," says he, "without giving you one little piece of purely practical advice. I advise you all to become what I am myself, a devoted disciple of Captain Cuttle, and to bind on your brows his admirable maxim, 'When found, make a note of.' Witty old Thomas Fuller says: 'Adventure not all thy learning in one bottom, but divide it between thy memory and thy note-books. . . . A commonplace book contains many notions in garrison, whence an owner may draw out an army into the field on competent warning.' This is one of those notions which I have kept in the garrison of my note-book for many

years. The great secret of reading consists in this, that it does not matter so much what we read or how we read it, as what we think and how we think it. Reading is only the fuel; and, the mind once on fire, any and all material will feed the flame, provided only it have any combustible matter in it. And we cannot tell from what quarter the next material will come. The thought we need, the facts we are in search of, may make their appearance in the corner of the newspaper, or in some forgotten volume long ago consigned to dust and oblivion. Hawthorne, in the parlor of a country inn, on a rainy day, could find mental nutriment in an old directory. That accomplished philologist, the late Lord Strangford could find ample amusement for an hour's delay at a railway station in tracing out the etymology of the names in Bradshaw. The mind that is not awake and alive will find a library a barren wilderness. Now, gather up the scraps and fragments of thought on whatever subject you may be studying—for of course by a note-book I do not mean a mere receptacle for odds and ends, a literary dustbin—but acquire the habit of gathering everything whenever and wherever you find it, that belongs in your line or lines of study, and you will be surprised to see how such fragments will arrange themselves into an orderly whole by the very organizing power of your own thinking, acting in a definite direction. This is a true process of self-education; but you see it is no mechanical process of mere aggregation. It requires activity of thought—but without that, what is any reading but mere passive amusement? And it requires method. I have myself a sort of literary book-keeping. I keep a day-book, and at my leisure I post my literary accounts, bringing together in proper groups the fruits of much casual reading."

I may appropriately close this chapter with some valuable words of advice on the use of note-books, which Mr. Charles A. Durfee, a competent authority on the subject, has kindly written for the benefit of my readers. "Note-books," says Mr. Durfee, "are to literary men what books of account are to business men, and are practically useful only as they are kept systematically and with unity of purpose. But where a balance-sheet tells the whole story in business, some methodical plan must be substituted to render the contents of note-books available at all times.

The natural desire on the part of energetic literary men to economize time and labor in the taking and keeping of notes leads to confusion, and in time they find themselves surrounded by a mass of material disheartening to think of and impossible to consult with readiness.

"A few suggestions resulting from long experience may be of value. Note-books should not be so small as to become too numerous, or so large as to be cumbersome. Each book should be paged and have a volume number. An underscored heading should precede each note with dividing lines between entries. By observing these precautions the books can be indexed in an alphabeted blank-book, and consulted as if they were the successive volumes of any indexed work. For ordinary purposes such a plan would be sufficient, but those whose lives are devoted to general literature or special branches require to give more attention to details. No blank-book index can long remain convenient, as the entries lose their alphabetical place.

"To obviate this, for permanent use, a card-index is indispensable, being always perfect in arrangement, inasmuch as the newly-made cards are inserted in their precise positions. In the case of blank-book indexes this is impossible as soon as a few titles have been interlined, which defaces and obscures the page. Cards cut from heavy manilla paper arranged in boxes or trays, separated by lettered divisions of cardboard projecting above the rest, form an index, which, from its expansiveness, cheapness, and portability, meets every requirement.

"A card measuring two inches by five inches has been generally adopted in our leading libraries for such purposes. Such a system renders unnecessary the keeping of separate note-books for different subjects, as a properly prepared index will be classified under adequate headings, and serve as a guide and summary to the entire literary matter, however extensive, of the most industrious workers."

THE CULTIVATION OF TASTE.

Taste can be cultivated. This remark, one would say, is of obvious truth, and needs no discussion whatever; but, in point of fact, scarcely anything related to the reading habit is more frequently ignored or practically denied. "I have no taste for poetry;" "I never could enjoy history;" "Biography may be very well, but I never could read it;" "I suppose Walter Scott and George Eliot *are* more profitable reading than G. P. R. James or Miss Braddon, but *my* taste prefers the latter;"—such remarks as these are sure to encounter one who is seeking to raise the standard of reading. Forgetting that growth and development are the almost unvarying method of nature in every line, too many people profess to believe, and certainly act as though thy believe, that a present literary taste is an inflexible and unalterable thing, to be accepted without question, and no more to be changed by us than our residence upon the earth instead of upon the moon.

Lord Lytton is not an author to whom I am accustomed to look for the highest conceptions of life or the wisest rules for its conduct; but on this subject of the cultivation of taste he puts some excellent words into the mouth of one of the characters of his novels, who explains that good sense and good taste are the result of a constant habit of right thinking and acting; of self denial; and of regulation rather than accident or natural temperament. "Good sense," says he, "is not a merely intellectual attribute. It is rather the result of a just equilibrium of all our faculties, spiritual and moral. The dishonest, or the toys of their own passions, may have genius; but they rarely, if ever, have good sense in the conduct of life. They may often win large prizes, but it is by a game of chance, not skill. But the man whom I perceive walking an honorable and upright career, just to others and also to himself, ... is a more dignified representative of his Maker than the mere child of genius. Of such a man, we say, he has *good sense*; yes, but he has also integrity, self-respect and self-denial. A thousand trials which his sense braves and conquers, are temptations also to his probity, his temper; in a word, to all the many sides of his complicated nature. Now, I do not think he

will have this good sense any more than a drunkard will have strong nerves, unless he be in the constant habit of keeping his mind clear from the intoxication of envy, vanity, and the various emotions that dupe and mislead us. Good sense is not, therefore, an abstract quality, or a solitary talent; it is the natural result of the habit of thinking justly, and, therefore, seeing clearly, and is as different from the sagacity that belongs to a diplomatist or an attorney as the philosophy of Socrates differed from the rheotoric of Gorgias. As a mass of individual excellences make up this attribute in a man, so a mass of such men thus characterized give a character to a nation. Your England is, therefore, renowned for its good sense, but it is renowned also for the excellences which accompany strong sense in an individual: high honesty and faith in its dealings, a warm love of justice and fair play, a general freedom from the violent crimes common on the Continent, and the energetic perseverance in enterprise once commenced, which results from a bold and heathful disposition."

A bold and healthful disposition, such as Lord Lytton thus ascribed to his typical Englishman, is ever on the watch for something better rather than something worse; for something that will develop and strengthen, rather than something that will merely pass muster. So it is in the choice of books. "It is nearly an axiom, that people will not be better than the books they read," says Bishop Potter. If a person never strives "to look up and not down," in his selection of books, he need not expect to see any improvement in his intellectual faculties or in his personal character so far as influenced by those faculties. President Porter well says: "Inspiration, genius, individual tastes, elective affinities, do not necessarily include self-knowledge, self-criticism, or self-control. If the genius of a man lies in the development of the individual person that he is, his manhood lies in finding out by self-study what he is and what he may become, and in wisely using the means that are fitted to form and perfect his individuality." The person who reads as he ought to read, therefore, will try to discover what his best intellectnal nature is now, and what it may grow to be in time to come. He will seek to add strength and facility to his mind, and he will constantly strive to correct such tendencies as he finds

injurious or not positively beneficial, substituting therefor, as soon as may be, a higher purpose and a more creditable achiement.

We must *learn* to know books, as we learn to know other good things. "Who can overestimate the value of good books,"—ask Professor W. P. Atkinson,—"those ships of thought, as Bacon so finely calls them, voyaging through the sea of time, and carrying their precious freight so safely from generation to generation! Here are the finest minds giving us the best wisdom of present and all past ages; here are intellects gifted far beyond ours, ready to give us the results of lifetimes of patient thought; imaginations open to the beauty of the universe, far beyond what it is given us to behold characters whom we can only vainly hope to imitate, but whom it is one of the highest privileges of life to know. Here they all are; and to learn to know them is the privilege of the educated man."

We cannot come to know them by accident, or by relying on past habitudes. "When I became a man," said Saint Paul, "I put away childish things:" and so must the manly reader put away the childish habit of reading story-books alone, or looking at pictures, or preferring amusement to instruction and mental development. Too many readers—one is tempted to say the majority of readers—never get beyond the picture-book stage; and, indeed, there are men and women in the world who read fewer books and poorer books than when they were little children.

Not only in the selection of books, but in the reading of them, must one's choice be guided, and so far as may be, elevated. I will quote here some sound advice offered by *The Literary World*, of Boston: "Almost every article of food has its poison; and a most important function of our internal economy consists in its intelligent discrimination between the good and the evil; its careful assimilation of the good, and its rigorous rejection of the evil. The good it gathers into the vessels which are the storehouse of life, but the bad it casts away. The peach with its prussic acid, the pie-plant with its oxalic acid, tea with its tannic acid, the tomato and even the potato, each with its own deleterious ingredient, are all illustrations of substances which contain what, in sufficient quantities, might be the death of man, were he not provided with the power of separating

between the forces of death and life. Were it not for the safeguards which we involuntarily practice we could not eat with safety half the things which now not only feed the body but gratify the taste. Something very like this power is needed with respect to the books we read. Our minds should cultivate the gift, in keeping with that of our physical organs within, whereby, feasting upon the rich and varied diet with which they are supplied, they may reserve only what is nutritious, or palatable, without being harmful, and at the same time throw off what is calculated to offend and injure. Few books can be mentioned in the general departments of literature which do not, like the foods we have mentioned above, contain the good and the bad combined. History is full of dangerous episodes, biography of specious examples, poetry of inflaming imaginings, and fiction of demoralizing license. And yet the worst of the books that are notoriously bad probably have some good in them; pictures which may be looked upon without harm, and lessons which it would be profitable to learn. A great art in reading, then, one which should be inculcated in theory, and in the practice of which the oldest and wisest of us should constantly be drilling ourselves, is this art of so carrying the mind along the paths of another's thought that it shall retain only the good and the true and the beautiful, while the bad and the false and the repulsive shall instantly pass out of sight and recollection. Only as we are masters of this art are we safe in the midst of the perils to which reading exposes us; and in this art, which may be settled by practice into a habit, our youth particularly should be zealously educated."

The great authors are the good authors, in whom feebleness, or coarseness, or whimsicality, or meanness and malice, are accidental rather than essential. When we are reading the master-books we need reject little; we can absorb much. And in our highest and truest moments we may share their greatness and stand, so to speak, on their level; for it is the *apprehension* of greatness that makes it great for us; and this very apprehension is an honor to us, and the measure of our own powers and attainments. Emerson does not make an overstatement when he says: "There is something of poverty in our criticism. We assume that there are few great men, all the rest are little; that there is but one Homer, but one Shakespeare, one

Newton, one Socrates. But the soul in her beaming hour does not acknowledge these usurpations. We should know how to praise Socrates, or Plato, or Saint John, without impoverishing us. In good hours we do not find Shakespeare or Homer over-great—only to have been translators of the happy present—and every man and woman divine possibilities. 'Tis the good reader that makes the good book; a good head cannot read amiss; in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear.

And behind the book stands the author; if the reader chooses the book or the chapter as he ought, he shares the author's best self and best hours; he associates with a hero rather than a dandy, with an intellectual giant, not a dwarf; and thereby he shows to what his own tastes have grown. There is truth and wisdom in the aged Victor Hugo's curious and Frenchy, but grave and deep-felt, preface to the recently made edition of his complete works: "Every man who writes a book; that book is himself. Whether he knows it or not, whether he wishes it or not, it is so. From every work, whatever it may be, mean or illustrious, there is shaped a figure, that of the writer. It is his punishment if he be small; it is his recompense if he be great. If we read of the siege of Troy, we see Achilles, Hector, Ulysses, Ajax, Agamemnon; we feel throughout the entire work a majesty which is that of the writer. Has Zoilus written? Let us examine what he has left. He was a grammarian, a commentator, a glossarist; in every line we read: Zoilus. But when the 'Iliad' is open before you, you hear the voice of the centuries say: Homer. In the same manner appear to us Æschylus, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Pindar, Theocritus, Plautus, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Tacitus, Dante. It is the same with the little; but why name them? The book exists; it is what the author has made it; it is history; philosophy, an epic; it belongs to the loftiest regions of art; it dwells in the lower regions; it is what he is; uncombined, insulated, arising forever by his side, is this shadow of himself, the figure of the author. Only at the close of a long life, laborious and stormy, given wholly to thought and to action, do these truths reveal themselves. Responsibility, the inseparable companion of liberty, shows itself. The man who traces these lines comprehends

them. He is calm. As immovable as if before the Infinite, he is not troubled. To all the questions which ignorance may propound he has but one reply: I am a conscience. This reply every man can make or has made. If he has made it with all the candor of a sincere soul, that suffices. As to him, feeble, ignorant, confined, but having endeavored to seek the good, he will say without fear to the great darkness, he will say to the unknown, he will say to the mystery: I am a conscience. And he will seem to feel the unity of the life universal in the complete tranquillity of that which is most simple before that which is most profound. There is a supreme talent which is often given alone, which requires none other, which is often concealed, and which has often more power the more it is hidden: this talent is esteem. Of the value of the work here given in its entirety to the public, the future must decide. But that which is certain, that which at present contents the author, is that in these times where we are, in this tumult of opinions, in the violence of prejudice, whatever may be the passions, the anger, the hate, no reader, whoever he may be, if he be himself worthy of esteem, can consider the book without an estimate of the author."

As I have said in a preceding chapter, the cultivation of taste is not hastened, but is seriously retarded, by pretending that one likes what he does not like. Sincerity and honesty are essential, no matter how low may be the present taste, or how serious the problem of elevating it. Nothing is gained by attempting to deceive others, or one's self, in the matter. The very expression of a low or degraded taste stimulates one to endeavor to raise it; whereas deceit or pretense are pretty sure to be transparent, and are even more injurious when successful than when they fail to deceive. A wholesome ignorance can easily be lifted above its former level; but of silly falsehood there is much less hope. A recent writer on "Sham Admiration in Literature" has said that there is "a well-nigh universal habit of literary lying—of a pretense of admiration for certain works of which in reality we know very little, and for which, if we knew more, we should perhaps care less. There are certain books which are standard, and as it were planted in the British soil, before which the great majority of us bow the knee and

doff the cap with a reverence that, in its ignorance, reminds one of fetish worship, and, in its affectation, of the passion for high art. The works without which, we are told at book auctions, 'no gentleman's library can be considered complete,' are especially the objects of this adoration. . . . A good deal of this mock worship is of course due to abject cowardice. A man who says he doesn't like the 'Rambler,' runs, with some folks, the risk of being thought a fool; but he is sure to be thought that, for something or another, under any circumstances; and, at all events, why should he not content himself, when the 'Rambler' is belauded, with holding his tongue and smiling acquiescence? It must be conceded that there are a few persons who really have read the 'Rambler,' a work, of course, I am merely using as a type of its class. In their young days it was used as a school-book, and thought necessary as a part of polite education; and as they have read little or nothing since, it is only reasonable that they should stick to their colors. Indeed, the French satirist's boast that he could predicate the views of any man with regard to both worlds, if he were only supplied with the simple data of his age and his income, is quite true, in general, with regard to literary taste. Given the age of the ordinary individual—that is to say of the gentleman 'fond of books, but who has really no time for reading'—and it is easy enough to guess his literary idols. They are the gods of his youth, and, whether he has been 'suckled in a creed outworn' or not, he knows no other. These persons, however, rarely give their opinion about literary matters, except on compulsion; they are harmless and truthful. The tendency of society in general, on the other hand, is not only to praise the 'Rambler,' which they have not read, but to express a noble scorn for those who have read it and don't like it." This writer goes on to discuss this "hypocrisy in literature" at length, and shows how many are ignorant of, or do not really like, the authors of whom everybody talks; and how their social career is marked by all sorts of equivocations and falsehoods with reference to those authors. "It is partly in consequence of this," he says, "that works, not only of acknowledged but genuine excellence, such as those I have been careful to select, are, though so universally praised, so little read. The poor student attempts them, but failing

—from many causes no doubt, but also sometimes from the fact of their not being there—to find those unrivaled beauties which he has been led to expect in every sentence, he stops short, where he would otherwise have gone on. He says to himself 'I have been deceived,' or 'I must be a born fool;' whereas he is wrong in both suppositions. . . . The habit of mere adhesion to received opinion in any matter is most mischievous, for it strikes at the root of independence of thought; and in literature it tends to make the public taste mechanical." And a taste that is both mechanical and false is surely not likely to be beneficial to society at large or to the individual reader. The remedy proposed by the writer from whom I have quoted is this: "It is not every one, of course, who has an opinion of his own upon every subject, far less on that of literature; but every one can abstain from expressing an opinion that is not his own."

And certainly I do not know a better starting-point than this, if one is really desirous of cultivating his taste. Do not pretend to like what you do not like. Do not pretend to know what you do not know. Do not be content with your taste as it is, but try to improve it; not expecting that you will ever like all that great men have written.

POETRY.

Some people read a great deal of poetry, with constant zest and unfailing advantage; others, though they may be "great readers" of other classes of literature, find little pleasure or profit in poetry. Is it a duty to read poetry? Should those who seem to have no natural taste for it, endeavor to cultivate a taste; or should they rest content with the conclusion that some minds appreciate and profit by poetical compositions, while other minds have no capacity for their enjoyment?

It may not be a downright *duty* to like poetry, or to try to like it; but certainly it is a misfortune that so large and lovely a division of the world's literature should be lost to any reader. The absence of a poetic taste is a sad indication of a lack of the imaginative faculty; and without imagination what is life? "The study and reading of poetry," says President Porter, "exercises and

cultivates the imagination, and in this way imparts intellectual power. It is impossible to read the products of any poet's imagination without using our own. To read what he creates is to recreate in our own minds the images and pictures which he first conceived and then expressed in language."

If a reader finds that the ideal has little or no place in his intellectual life or in his daily processes of thought and feeling, then he should consider, with all soberness, the fact that a God-given power is slipping away from him—a power without which his best faculties must become atrophied ; without which he loses the greater half of the enjoyment of life, day by day ; without which, in very truth, he cannot see all the glory of the open door of the Kingdom of Heaven. Children are poets ; they see fairy-land in a poor broken set of toy crockery or in a ragged company of broken-nosed dolls. Their powers of imagination ought never to be lost in the humdrum affairs of a workaday world ; their habit of finding the real in the ideal is one which cannot be laid aside without great detriment to the individual life and character. There may, then, be persons who "have no capacity for poetry," and who cannot cultivate a taste for it ; but this inability, if real, is to be mourned as a mental blindness and deafness, shutting out whole worlds from sight and hearing.

There is, of course, a great deal of imaginative literature which is not poetry, in the technical sense ; but if one can read Hawthorne or Richter with pleasure, he is quite sure to find no stumbling-block in Schiller's "Lay of the Bell" or Drake's "Culprit Fay." It is the poetic spirit that we should recognize and take to our hearts, whatever be the outward form in which it may be enshrined.

What is the poetic spirit ? Many have been the attempts to define it ; but, after all, we can only say, in the words Shelley wrote in his "Hymn to the Spirit of Nature :" "All feel, yet see thee never." Or again, is not poetry to be described, as nearly as we may describe it, in two more lines from the same fine poem ?—

> Lamp of Earth, where'er thou movest
> Its dim shapes are clad with brightness.

In Professor W. P. Atkinson's excellent lecture on reading is a passage concerning poetry, which is both imagina-

tive and practical. "I have no thought," says he, "of attempting here a definition of poetry, though I should like to come and give you a lecture on the art of reading it. Whether we call it, with Aristotle, imitation; whether we say more worthily, with Bacon, 'that it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind, whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things;' whether, in more modern times, we define it, with Shelley, as 'the best and happiest thoughts of the best and happiest minds;' or say, with Matthew Arnold, that 'poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things;' and, again, that 'it is to the poetical literature of an age that we must in general look for the most perfect and most adequate interpretation of that age;' or whether we say, with the greatest poet of the last generation, that 'poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science'—all I am concerned to say here is, that poetry is that branch of the literature of power pre-eminently worthy of *study*, and that without study we shall know but little about it."

We need not think, then, that the reading of poetry is a matter of whim or accident, to be undertaken without thought or study. President Porter says that "a taste for poetry, especially that of the highest order, is to a great extent the product of special culture." The foundation for this culture lies in the individual mind; for its development he must seek his material from the treasures around him, and must work out his methods of utilizing that material with the same care—or even greater—which he applies to other departments of intellectual exercise. Let him, if he finds his taste in need of cultivation, begin with such poems as he likes; read them more than once; learn their teachings; apprehend their inner spirit and purpose. Whatever the beginning, it is sure to lead to something better, if the reader will but resolutely determine to know what the writer meant to say; to see the picture that he portrayed; and to share his enthusiasm and warmth of feeling.

Mr. G. J. Goschen, a leading English banker and political economist, declares that the cultivation of the

imagination is essential to the highest success in politics, in learning, and in the commercial business of life. No one is too dull, or too prosaic, or too much absorbed in the routine of "practical life" to be absolved from the care of his imaginative powers; and no one is likely to find that this care will not repay him even in a practical sense. He who thinks wisely, he who perceives quickly that which others do not see at all, is better equipped for any work than one whose mind works slowly and feebly, and whose apprehensions have grown rusty from disuse.

Poetry is not for the few, but for the many, for all. The world's great poems, absolutely without exception, have been poems whose meaning has been perfectly clear and whose language has been simple—poems which have addressed themselves to the plain and common sense of the ages. Obscurity and whimsicality may belong to the Brownings of literature—to the star-gazing Transcendentalists of 1840, or to the posturing "impressionists" of to-day. But Homer, and Virgil, and Dante, and Chaucer, and Shakespeare need no mystical commentary to explain their meaning; like Mark Antony, they "only speak right on." If a poem is obscure, you may know by that mark alone that it is a second-rate—or tenth-rate—affair, and that it is not worth your while to vex your brain over it at all. If a poet has not made himself, it is his fault and not yours—if you are a person of average intellectual capacity. Feel not abashed if you do not comprehend the "orphic" or the "intense;" most likely the author did not comprehend it himself. Sunlight, air, water—these are not for the few; nor is poetry to be cooped and confined any more than these.

Principal Shairp thus speaks of this inherent quality of the best poetry—a quality which all men may apprehend if they will: "The pure style is that which, whether it describes a scene, a character, or a sentiment, lays hold of its inner meaning, not its surface; the type which the thing embodies, not the accidents; the core or heart of it, not the accessories. . . . Descriptions of this kind, while they convey typical conceptions, yet retain perfect individuality. They are done by a few strokes, in the fewest possible words; but each stroke tells, each word goes home. Of this kind is the poetry of the Psalms and of the Hebrew prophets. It is seen in the brief, impres-

sive way in which Dante presents the heroes or heroines of his nether world, as compared with Virgil's more elaborate pictures. In all of Wordsworth that has really impressed the world, this will be found to be the chief characteristic. It is seen especially in his finest lyrics and his most impressive sonnets. Take only three poems that stand together in his works, "Glen Almain," "Stepping Westward," "The Solitary Reaper." In each you have a scene and its sentiment brought home with the minimum of words, the maximum of power. It is distinctive of the pure style that it relies not on side effects, but on the total impression—that it produces a unity in which all the parts are subordinated to one paramount aim. The imagery is appropriate, never excessive. You are not distracted by glaring single lines or two splendid images. There is one tone, and that all pervading—reducing all the materials, however diverse, into harmony with the one total result designed. This style in its perfection is not to be attained by any rules of art. The secret of it lies further in than rules of art can reach, even in this: that the writer sees his object, and this only; feels the sentiment of it, and this only; is so absorbed in it, lost in it, that he altogether forgets himself and his style, and cares only in fewest, most vital words to convey to others the vision his own soul sees. . . . The ornate style in poetry is altogether different from this. No doubt the multitude of uneducated and half-educated readers, which every day increases, loves a highly ornamented, not to say a meretricious style, both in literature and in the arts; and if these demand it, writers and artists will be found to furnish it. There remains, therefore, to the most educated the task of counterworking this evil. With them it lies to elevate the thought and to purify the taste of less cultivated readers, and to remedy one of the evils incident to democracy. To high thinking and noble living the pure style is natural. But these things are severe, require moral bracing, minds not luxurious but which can endure hardness. Softness, self-pleasing, and moral limpness find their congenial element in excess of highly-colored ornamentation. On the whole, when once a man is master of himself and of his materials, the best rule that can be given him is to forget style altogether, and to think only of the reality to be expressed. The more the mind is

intent on the reality, the simpler, truer, more telling the style will be. The advice which the great preacher gives for conduct holds not less for all kinds of writing: "Aim at things, and your words will be right without aiming. Guard against love of display, love of singularity, love of seeming original. Aim at meaning what you say, and saying what you mean." When a man who is full of his subject and has matured his powers of expression sets himself to speak thus simply and sincerely, whatever there is in him of strength or sweetness, of dignity or grace, of humor or pathos, will find its way out naturally into his language. That language will be true to his thought, true to the man himself."

How different is such poetical language from the poetry of the obscure, or the mock-sentimental, or the positively base! What *The Saturday Review* has said of Byron is true of many another poet: "Even Byron's best passages will not stand critical examination. They excite rather than transport, and when the reader examines seriously what he has felt, the impression of a vague contagious excitement is all that he retains. In reading Byron, the reader dimly feels that he is in the presence of a very eloquent person who is, or would like to be thought, in a state of great excitement about something, and that it is his duty to become excited too.

True poetry has a far nobler mission than to puzzle, or to amuse, or to excite; it is the voice of all that is best in humanity, speaking from man to man. Not all of us can thus speak, but we can all hear, and incorporate what we hear in our best and truest life, day by day.

THE ART OF SKIPPING.

It is a fortunate thing that one of the most hackneyed quotations concerning books and reading should also be one of the most sensible ones: Lord Bacon's saying that "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

The following of this piece of advice has done a great

deal of good; and no harm is likely to come from its wise observance. Some people profess to believe that a book that is worth reading at all is worth reading straight through—a piece of foolishness that would be paralleled by an insistance upon eating a table-full every time one sits down to a meal. A person who makes up his mind to read all of a book or none, must be fully convinced of the solemn truth of the saying that "a book's a book, although there's nothing in't." Against such lack of wisdom the sturdy common sense of Lord Bacon's remark may be put. The reader need but rest assured of its unquestionable truth, and spend his time in trying to discover what books are to be tasted, what swallowed, and what digested; rather than vex his soul in questioning whether the general advice is sound or not.

A book that is worth reading all through is pretty sure to make its worth known. There is something in the literary conscience which tells a reader whether he is wasting his time or not. An hour or a minute may be sufficient opportunity for forming a decision concerning the worth or worthlessness of the book. If it is utterly bad and valueless, then skip the whole of it, as soon as you have made the discovery. If a part is good and a part bad, accept the one and reject the other. If you are in doubt, take warning at the first intimation that you are misspending your opportunity and frittering away your time over an unprofitable book. Reading that is of questionable value is not hard to find out; it bears its notes and marks in unmistakable plainness, and it puts forth, all unwittingly, danger signals of which the reader should take heed.

The art of skipping is, in a word, the art of noting and shunning that which is bad, or frivolous, or misleading, or unsuitable for one's individual needs. If you are convinced that the book or the chapter is bad, you cannot drop it too quickly. If it is simply idle and foolish, put it away on that account—unless you are properly seeking amusement from idleness and frivolity. If it is deceitful and disingenuous, your task is not so easy, but your conscience will give you warning, and the sharp examination which should follow will tell you that you are in poor literary company.

But there are a great many books which are good in themselves, and yet are not good at all times or for all readers.

No book, indeed, is of universal value and appropriateness. As has been said in previous chapters of this series, the individual must always dare to remember that he has his own legitimate tastes and wants, and that it is not only proper to follow them, but highly improper to permit them to be overruled by the tastes and wants of others. It is right for one to neglect entirely, or to skip through, pages which another should study again and again. Let each reader ask himself: Why am I reading this? What service will it be to me? Am I neglecting something else that would be more beneficial? Here, as in every other question involved in the choice of books, the golden key to knowledge, a key that will only fit its own proper doors, is *purpose*.

Thus the reader is the pupil, and the companion, and the fellow worker of the author, not his slave. "It is a wise book that is good from title-page to the end," says A. Bronson Alcott. Such a book should be read through; but the books that are wise in spots should be read in spots. Again, Mr. Alcott says: "I value books for their suggestiveness even more than for the information they may contain; volumes that may be taken in hand and laid aside, read at odd moments, containing sentences that take possession of my thought and prompt to the following them into their wider relations with life and things." This suggestiveness of books read at odd moments is one of the great advantages of judicious skipping. From this habit comes, often, a riper and wholesomer harvest than would spring from the most painstaking devotion to regulated and routine reading and study. One page, one sentence, thus planted in the fertile soil of a receptive mind, is better than a whole library read from a mere sense of duty, and without reference to one's own true welfare, as indicted by his nature and his needs.

No one thus wisely choosing what he may best read need be in any fear that he is a superficial reader. "Did you ever happen to see,"—asks a writer whose name I have unfortunately lost—"did you ever happen to see, in shrewd, old, hard-headed Bishop Whately's annotations on Lord Bacon's essays, a good passage about what is and what is not superficiality? It is in the sentence in Bacon's Essay on Studies, 'Crafty men contemn studies.' 'This contempt,' says the bishop, 'whether of crafty men

or narrow-minded men, finds its expression in the word 'smattering,' and the couplet is become almost a proverb:

> A little learning is a dangerous thing:
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

But the poet's remedies for the dangers of a little learning are both of them impossible. No one can drink deep enough to be in truth anything more than superficial; and every human being that is not a downright idiot must taste. And the bishop, in his downright way, goes on to give practical illustrations of the usefulness of a little knowledge, and proceeds: 'What then, is the smattering, the imperfect and superficial knowledge that does deserve contempt? A slight and superficial knowledge is justly condemned when it is put in the place of more full and exact knowledge. Such an acquaintance with chemistry and anatomy, for instance, as would be creditable and not useless to a lawyer, would be contemptible for a physician; and such an acquaintance with law as would be desirable for him would be a most discreditable smattering for a lawyer.'"

Mr. Hamerton has some wise words on this subject: "It becomes a necessary part," says he, "of the art of intellectual living, so to order our work as to shield ourselves if possible, at least during a certain portion of our time, from the evil consequences of hurry. The whole secret lies in a single word—Selection. . . . . The art is to select the reading which will be most useful to our purpose, and, in writing, to select the words which will express our meaning with the greatest clearness in a little space. The art of reading is to skip judiciously. Whole libraries may be skipped in these days, when we have the results of them in our modern culture without going over the ground again. And even of the books we decide to read, there are almost always large portions which do not concern us, and which we are sure to forget the day after we have read them. The art is to skip all that does not concern us, while missing nothing that we really need. No external guidance can teach us this; for nobody but ourselves can guess what the needs of our intellect may be. But let us select with decisive firmness, independently of other people's advice, independently of the authority of custom."

Of course it follows that, to some extent, we can let others do the work of selection for us, subject to correction wherever necessary. "In comparing the number of good books with the shortness of life, many might well be read by proxy, if we had good proxies," says Emerson. Sensible literary guides must be followed to a large extent, whether in their recommendation of one book as against another, or of certain poems or prose extracts in comparison with others. Books of selection, it is true, sometimes omit things we would have greatly liked; but who will pretend to say that he always finds everything that would have pleased or profited him, even when he makes his own choice? As no worker in any field of labor can, in this social world, dispense with the help of others, so it is especially necessary for readers to follow the guidance of pioneers and wise critics; and to make use of the selections these critics have made, as well as their indication of whole books. And sometimes, as Emerson's remark shows us, we may not only delegate to others the work of choice and selection, but also that of reading itself.

THE USE OF TRANSLATIONS.

A FEW words concerning the use of translations of the masterpieces of other languages may be properly given here, because it is a subject concerning which most guides to reading have nothing whatever to say; and to which the majority of intelligent readers, even, have given very little thought. Great as is the neglect of good reading in one's own language, still greater is the lack of attention to English translations of the noble books of other literatures than our own.

An intelligent comprehension of one's needs in the choice of books should certainly include due attention to the literature of France, or Germany, or Italy, or Greece, or Spain; or, in other words, such a comprehension should never forget that good literature is not an insular affair, bounded by the limits of one country, or by the letters of one language. Of course it is both natural and proper that the greater part of our reading should be of books of

American or English authorship; but our culture and training will be greatly impoverished if, because of a partial or complete unfamiliarity with the languages in which they wrote, we take no account of Homer, or Virgil, or Dante, or Goethe.

Speaking in general terms, the entire body of the *best* literature of other lands is accessible in adequate English translations. And of the use which may be made of them, let Emerson speak, in one of the most familiar passages of his essay on books: "The respectable and sometimes excellent translations of Bohn's Library have done for literature what railroads have done for internal intercourse. I do not hesitate to read all the books I have named, and all good books, in translations. What is really best in any book is translatable—any real insight or broad human sentiment. Nay, I observe that, in our Bible, and other books of lofty moral tone, it seems easy and inevitable to render the rhythm and music of the original into phrases of equal melody. The Italians have a fling at translators—*i traditori traduttori;* but I thank them. I rarely read any Greek, Latin, German, Italian, sometimes not a French book, in the original, which I can procure in a good version. I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven. I should as soon think of swimming across Charles River when I wish to go to Boston, as of reading all my books in originals, when I have them rendered for me in my mother-tongue." If such a man as Emerson thus recognizes the utility of translations, surely the average reader cannot afford to ignore them; whether from his feeling that he must read books in the original or not at all, or because he carelessly permits himself to forget that vast land which lies beyond the bounds of his immediate literary horizon.

Mr. Emerson is one of the scholarly men of his age; an author who has, in an especial degree, made the wisdom of all times pay tribute to him. If any contemporary writer could properly be "above" reading translations, he might be supposed to be that one; and yet he takes advanced ground in the matter, and speaks ten times as boldly as a mere village pedant would dare to speak. Let us also hear what Philip Gilbert Hamerton has to say on the same subject—bearing in mind that Mr. Hamerton's tes-

timony is of especial value, because he might well be thought likely to take exactly the contrary view, inasmuch as he has lived in France and England, married a French wife, and uses the French and English languages with absolute indifference. He says: "Mature life brings so many professional or social duties that it leaves scant time for culture, and those who care for culture most earnestly and sincerely, are the very persons who will economize time to the utmost. Now, to read a language that has been very imperfectly mastered is felt to be a bad economy of time. Suppose the case of a man occupied in business who has studied Greek rather assiduously in youth and yet not enough to read Plato with facility. He can read the original, but he reads it so slowly that it would cost him more hours than he can spare and this is why he has recourse to a translation. In this case there is no indifference to Greek culture; on the contrary, the reader desires to assimilate what he can of it, but the very earnestness of his wish to have free access to ancient thought makes him prefer it in modern language."

Mr. Hamerton also points out very effectively that even an intelligent and apparently deep study of another language may not bring with it an insight into its spirit, or a true knowledge of its richest treasures: "Suppose a society of Frenchmen, in some secluded little French village where no Englishman ever penetrates, and that these Frenchmen learn English from dictionaries, and set themselves to speak English with each other, without anybody to teach them the colloquial language or its pronunciation, without ever once hearing the sound of it from English lips, what sort of English would they create among themselves? This is a question that I happen to be able to answer very accurately, because I have known two Frenchmen who studied English literature just as the Frenchmen of the sixteenth century studied the literature of ancient Rome. One of them, especially, had attained what would certainly in the case of a dead language be considered a very high degree of scholarship indeed. Most of our great authors were known to him, even down to the close critical comparison of different readings. Aided by the most powerful memory I ever knew he had amassed such stores that the acquisitions, even of cultivated Englishmen, would in many cases have appeared

inconsiderable beside them. But he could not write or speak English in a manner tolerable to an Englishman; and although he knew nearly all the words in the language, it was dictionary knowledge, and so different from an Englishman's apprehension of the same words that it was only a sort of pseudo-English that he knew, and not our living tongue. His appreciation of our authors, especially our poets, differed so widely from English criticism and feeling that it was evident that he did not understand them as we understand them. Two things especially proved this: he frequently mistook declamatory versification for poetry of an elevated order; while on the other hand, his ear failed to perceive the music of the musical poets, as Byron and Tennyson. How *could* he hear their music, he to whom our English sounds were all unknown? Here, for example, is the way he read 'Claribel:'

At ev ze bittle bommess
Azvart ze zeeket lon
At none ze veeld be ommess
Aboot ze most edston
At meedneeg ze mon commess
An lokez dovn alon
Ere songg ze lintveet svelless
Ze clirvoiced mavi dvelless
Ze fledgling srost lispess
Ze slombroos vav ootvelless
Ze babblang ronnel creespess
Ze ollov grot replee-ess
Vere Claribel lovlee-ess."

Plainly, then, "liberally educated" people, as such, have no right to affect superiority over such persons as venture to assert that English translations of foreign works are not only permissible reading, but that they sometimes convey a far better idea of foreign literature than may be obtained from any save the most complete and successful study of other tongues. The average college graduate is almost certain to be a mere baby in his knowledge of the ancient and modern *literature* of Europe, though he has professed to study Latin six or seven years, and Greek four or five years, and French and German two or three terms. Of this study, fully nine-tenths has been of grammatical forms, and etymological niceties, and syntactical constructions; and his translating has been done by piece-

meal, in such a way as to destroy pretty effectually all idea of the largeness and noble quality of the text in hand —and still more of the literature of which that text is a part. Etymology is not literature; syntax is not literature; the conjugation of a verb is not literature. They may or may not be the gateways of an adequate knowledge of literature; more often they are not, in our usual scheme of college education. Whatever advantages may be derived from the grammatical study of a language—and they are great, perhaps essential—the student should not imagine that grammatical study, unsupplemented by something more, is literary study. I am not decrying grammar, I am only saying that philology is one thing, and a knowledge of the spirit and life of a foreign literature is quite another thing. There are old and eminent colleges at the north which do far less toward leading their students toward the literatures of their own and other languages than is done by more than one small and feeble institution at the west or south. So far as literary culture is concerned, then, these venerable and illustrious colleges are failures, and these new and feebly equipped "universities" of newer communities are successes. An institution of learning which fetters its classes in chains whose links are mere grammatical niceties, is not to be accounted a literary institution at all, in comparison with one which directs its students to the fair fields of belles-lettres, and strives to imbue them with the idea that the spirit and life of Homer is something beyond and above the anatomy of the Greek verb. A college of the former kind may, indeed, graduate scholars, but an institution of the latter kind may send forth in a single day, as in the Bowdoin class of 1825, a Longfellow and a Hawthorne—the foremost poet and the foremost prose writer of a country.

Every reader, whether college bred or not, whether he can read his Bible in half a dozen languages or in English alone, should therefore remember that it is his bounden duty to know somewhat of the world's literature. If he can know it at first hand, in the original tongue, so much the better; but, if, as must usually happen, he must look to English translations, let him not forget that a Keats, who knew not a word of Greek, got nearer the heart of Greek literature than a hundred Porsons could ever do. Better is a single book of Bryant's Homer—so far as

Greek letters are concerned—than five years of mere verbal grubbing over the grammar and dictionary.

HOW TO READ PERIODICALS.

It is wholly unadvisable to attempt to regulate one's plans of reading with the intention of leaving out newspapers and other periodicals, as "waste of time." There is no doubt that the average book is far more profitable reading than the average copy of a newspaper; but it by no means follows that the best book is at all times a better thing to read than the best newspaper. In this age of many periodicals, a very large share of the best literature first appears in them; and, aside from literature proper, one's scheme of reading is very defective if it takes no account of the news of the day. A reader has no right to be well acquainted with ancient history, or with the treasures of poetry or romance, if such acquaintance has been purchased at the price of entire ignorance of the great events and the leading principles of contemporary life.

In Mr. Philip Gilbert Hamerton's "Intellectual Life"—a book from which I have already quoted so many times as to show my high appreciation of it as a helper to sound habits of mental regimen—is a chapter addressed "to a friend (highly cultivated) who congratulated himself on having entirely abandoned the habit of reading newspapers." Mr. Hamerton admits that this friend will have a definite gain to show for whatever may be his loss; and that some five hundred hours a year will be saved to him as a time-income which may be applied to whatever purpose he may select. "In those five hundred hours," says he to his friend, "which are now your own you may acquire a science, or obtain a more perfect command over one of the languages which you have studied. Some department of your intellectual labors which has hitherto been unsatisfactory to you, because it was too imperfectly cultivated, may henceforth be as orderly and as fruitful as a well-kept garden. You may become thoroughly conversant with the works of more than one great author whom you have neglected, not from lack of interest, but from want of time." But against these gains must be set the

loss of political and social intelligence; of the ability to deal with the practical questions of the life in which one lives; and of a large part of that community of knowledge which is so essential to the right development of a mind and of a character. In a word, total abstinence from the reading of periodicals must make a person to some extent both ignorant and selfish. "He who has not learned to read his daily newspaper," says W. P. Atkinson, "will hardly read Gibbon and Grote to any purpose; he who cannot see history in the streets of Boston will trouble himself to no purpose with books about Rome or Pompeii." President Porter avers that "it must be acknowledged that periodicals are in many respects a great intellectual convenience. They abbreviate labor and place the results of the research of a few at the service and disposal of the many. . . . Oftentimes an article is better than a book." The same thought is thus worded by F. B. Perkins: "Read periodicals; not idly and wastefully, but so as to keep up with the truth of the present as well as to learn the truth of the past. More and more, wise and good thoughts are published in these temporary forms. . . . The important thing is to avoid being limited to one journal; to see as many as possible, and to learn to choose what is valuable and to skip the rest."

Admitting thus the utility of the reading of periodicals, and even insisting upon the necessity and duty of reading them, it must nevertheless be said in the plainest manner that an alarming amount of time is wasted over them, or worse than wasted. When we have determined that newspapers and magazines ought to be read, let us by no means flatter ourselves that all our reading of them is commendable or justifiable. I am quite safe in saying that the individual who happens to be reading these lines wastes more than half the time that he devotes to periodicals; and that he wastes it because he does not regulate that time as he ought. "To learn to choose what is valuable and to skip the rest" is a good rule for reading periodicals; and it is a rule whose observance will reduce, by fully one-half, the time devoted to them, and will save time and strength for better intellectual employments—to say nothing of the very important fact that discipline in this line will prevent the reader from falling into that demoralizing and altogether disgraceful inability

to hold the mind upon any continuous subject of thought or study, which is pretty sure to follow in the train of undue or thoughtless reading of periodicals. And when, as too often happens, a man comes to read nothing save his morning paper at breakfast or on the train, and his evening paper after his day's work is over, that man's brain, so far as reading is concerned, is only half alive. It cannot carry on a long train of thought or study; it notes superficial things rather than inner principles; it seeks to be amused or stimulated, rather than to be instructed.

How, then, shall we set to work to put in practice that important truth which President Porter states thus: "One should use the newspaper as a servant and not as a master?"

In the first place, there are very many periodicals that are not worth reading at all—"story-papers" in particular, that neither instruct nor profitably amuse. Then, there are among the newspapers of the day a large number which look at men and things from the standpoint of the superficial cynic or the "man of the world." When a paper lacks sincerity and purpose in what it says, and habitually sneers and jests, that paper is a good one to let alone. To this class belong too many of our daily newspapers, in which a real apprehension of the seriousness of life, and of its nobility and beauty, seems utterly lacking. The habitual reading of such papers is enough to make one a joker without wit, a critic without knowledge, a loafer rather than a worker, a grimacing, monkey-like looker-on rather than a soldier in the battle of life. These are strong words; but if the reading of certain papers I could name, and which my readers could name, does not have this effect, it is due to the reader rather than to the newspaper. In the reading of papers which are worthy of being read, we should bring every article or item, so far as may be, before the tribunal of our intellectual conscience, and demand of it what is its purpose, and what its utility to ourselves. If a thing is useless to us, then we may advantageously let it alone. A paper or a magazine is not all for everybody; some things in it are for you, some for me, some for others. We can readily tell what belongs to us and what to somebody else. Again in the things which we may properly read, we should bear it in mind not to exceed the proper proportion of time to

be devoted to a particular subject. It is often enough to know that an event has taken place, without reading all the particulars. Newspapers are pretty sure to violate the true perspective of events; and their violation of perspective we must correct for ourselves. One very valuable help toward reducing the time we spend over newspapers is to keep in check the attention we are all too ready to give to speculations as to what *may* happen if certain contingencies arise in the future. "A large proportion of newspaper writing," says Hamerton, "is occupied with speculations on what is likely to happen in the course of a few months; therefore, by waiting until the time is past we know the event without having wasted time in speculations which could not affect it." We should put ourselves in the position of one who bears in mind the "long result of time," as well as the particular duties and experiences of the day. The cultivation of this principle will also do much to remove the dangerous influence of an undue devotion to the ephemeral excitements and bitternesses of partisan politics, in which newspapers of course play an active part. Hamerton even goes so far as to advise the avoidance of all literature that has a controversial tone. This is urging more than is practicable or advisable; but we can at least read newspapers in such a manner that we need not be ashamed of ourselves after election-day.

Some sound hints on newspaper reading, with especial reference to fixing its place in our intellectual employment of time, and to its regulation by intelligent purpose, have lately been offered by Mr. Horace E. Scudder. "In the daily life of a vast number of people," he says, "reading the newspaper is as regular an occupation as taking breakfast. The day does not seem begun unless the newspaper is read. Ask one of these readers as he lays the paper down, 'Is there any news?' and ten to one he will be unable to recall what he has just read. He has not necessarily read inattentively. He has, perhaps, been so absorbed that he failed to see the impatience of some one near him anxious also to get a view of the paper. But his mind has been directed to a great variety of subjects, in all of which he may have an easy interest, and he has settled off-hand a number of cases which have come up for judgment. It is easy to look at the paper philosoph-

ically as containing an epitome of the life of the world during the past twenty-four hours, and, no doubt, in our modern comprehensiveness of interest, we feel as lively an interest in Afghanistan as our fathers felt in Canada; but it remains a fact that there is quite as much dissipation of thought as concentration in reading the daily newspaper. It rarely serves as a mental stimulus, or leaves one with a conscious elevation of spirit. We do not disparage the daily use of the newspaper, but we desire to fix its place, and to remind ourselves that it cannot be a substitute for reading and thinking. The very construction of a newspaper takes it out of the region of literature. It has been argued that in process of time educative processes will show Macaulays and Froudes holding the reporters' pencils. It seems to be intended by such phrases to denote the elevation of reporting to a place in literary art, and those writers are taken for models who have held their readers chiefly by the brilliancy of their style. Well, this is not impossible, for the merits which such writers have, lie largely on the surface, and call for little leisure either in writer or reader. But the daily newspaper in all its parts must speak quickly and to the point. What is so old as yesterday's paper. When people go to sea they haste to buy the very latest edition of half a dozen dailies; their land life is still upon them and they are driven by it. But an hour or two of neglect after the steamer leaves its port has lost them the opportunity of reading. The horizon of sea and sky find no place for the paper, and it lies unread. The tendency in the paper itself is to paragraph; and if there is a long report of an address, or detailed account of something just now attracting attention, it is broken into bits with headings so that it need not look long and dull. Every concession is made to the hurried, impatient, and listless reader. It is plain that the newspaper serves a temporary end, even though that end is every day renewed. We are not denying its usefulness when we plead for as regular a daily reading which shall have another kind of value and serve another end. Let us suppose half an hour in a hurried day given to the newspaper. Any one who will make the experiment may see that he can read the same newspaper in one-half the time by a skillful process of elimination. He can omit the accidents, for example—at least such as have not be-

fallen his friends and neighbors. A glance at the fires will assure him whether there is one which concerns him. He is not bound to read the details of even an interesting one which happens to be reported in his paper. If it had been given in four lines instead of forty he would have missed nothing. Any one, by exercising a judicious self-restraint, can easily reduce his reading of what he is immediately going to put out of his mind, one half."

As for the reading of magazines and reviews, and of newspapers which are devoted to comment and criticism rather than news, it need only be said that the time spent over them need be watched somewhat less strictly, and that the following of the same principle of *purpose*, of which we have spoken so often, will make easy the selection of articles.

READING ALOUD, AND READING CLUBS.

"How should we read?" asks Bishop Alonzo Potter in his still useful handbook for readers; and then the good bishop proceeds to answer the question in four replies: "First, thoughtfully and critically; secondly, in company with a friend, or your family; thirdly, repeatedly; fourthly, with pen in hand."

Reading aloud, in the company of others—the practice commended by Bishop Potter in the second of these rules—is in every way advantageous. Its least important advantage is nevertheless highly salutary; that it affords valuable means for elocutionary development; and, aside from this, it promotes thought, it stimulates one mind by contact with another; and it almost inevitably calls forth, by discussion, facts and opinions which otherwise would not have been considered.

In one of his recent jeremiads on the alleged decline and inutility of the public school system, Mr. Richard Grant White offers some suggestions on the training of classes in the art of reading aloud, which are so sound and sensible that they may well be repeated here to general readers as well as educators. "Of all knowledge and mental training," says Mr. White, "reading is in our day the principal means, and reading aloud intelligently the unmistakable, if not the only sign. Yet, this, which was

so common when the present generation of mature men were boys, is just what our highly and scientifically educational educators seem either most incapable or most neglectful of teaching. And yet the means by which children were made intelligent and intelligible readers, thirty-five or forty years ago, were not so recondite as to be beyond attainment and use by a teacher of moderate abilities and acquirement, who set himself earnestly to his work. As I remember it, this was the way in which we were taught to read with pleasure to ourselves and with at least satisfaction to our readers. Boys of not more than seven to nine years old were exercised in defining words from an abridged dictionary. The word was spelled and the definition given from memory, and then the teacher asked questions which tested the pupil's comprehension of the definition that he had given, and the members of the class, never more than a dozen or fourteen in number, were encouraged to give in their own language their notion of the word and to distinguish it from so-called synonyms. As to the amount of knowledge that was thus gained, it was very little—little, at least, in comparison with the value of this exercise at education, that is, of mental training, which was very great. The same class read aloud every day, and the books that they read were of sufficient interest to tempt boys to read them of themselves. . . . When the reading began all the class were obliged to follow the reader, each in his own book; for any pupil was liable to be called upon to take up the recitation, even at an unfinished sentence, and go on with it; and if he hesitated in such a manner as showed that his eye and mind were not with the reader's, the effect upon his mark account was the same as if he himself had failed in reading. If the reading of any sentence did not show a just apprehension of its meaning, the reader was stopped and the sentence was passed through the class for a better expression of its sense. Whether this was obtained from the pupils or not, the teacher then explained the sense or gave some information, the want of which had caused the failure, and by repetition of both readings —the bad and the good—showed by contrast and by comment why the one was bad and why the other good. Words were explained; if they were compound words they were analyzed; the different shades of meaning which

words have in different connections were remarked upon, and the subject of the essay, the narration, or the poem which formed the lesson for the day was explained. The delivery of the voice was attended to; not in any pretentious, artificial, elocutionary way, but with such regard for good and pleasant speech as was dictated by common sense and good breeding. The young readers were not allowed to hang their heads either over their bosoms or over their shoulders, but were made to stand up straight, throw back their shoulders, lift their heads well up, so that if their eyes were taken from their books they would look a man straight in the face. Only in this position can the voice be well delivered. The slightest mispronunciation was, of course, observed and corrected, and not only so, but bad enunciation was checked, and all slovenly mumbling was reprehended, and as far as possible reformed. Yet with all this there was constant caution against a prim, pedantic and even a conscious mode of reading. The end sought was an intelligent, natural, and simple delivery of every sentence. Of course, a lesson in reading like this was no trifling matter. It was, indeed, the longest recitation of the session, and the one at which the instructive powers of the teacher were most severely tested. But it was the most valuable, the most important lesson of the day. By it the pupil was taught not only to read well and speak well, but to think. His powers of attention and apprehension were put in exercise, and he was obliged to discriminate shades of meaning before he could express them by inflection of voice. Reading aloud well was then regarded as inferior in importance to no other 'branch' of education; it was practiced until pupils were prepared to enter college, the later reading lessons being taken from Milton or Pope or Burke, or some other writers of the highest class, and being again accompanied by explanation and criticism. In the earlier years of a boy's school time any other recitation would be omitted by the teacher sooner than that of reading aloud. How it is, or why it is, that such instruction in reading has fallen into disuse I do not know. Indeed, I know that it is disused only by the chorus of complaint that goes upon all sides, both in England and in the United States, that children cannot read aloud and that they cannot write from dictation. This, of course, could not be if children were taught in

the manner which I have endeavored to describe. A schoolboy of eight or nine years old, if taught in that way, would know how to read English aloud decently well, if he knew nothing else. And it is really more important that he should know how to do this well, and that he should learn to do it in some such manner as I have described, than that he should begin the study of the arts and sciences."

In this connection there occurs to the mind a single verse of the Bible, which comprises, in twenty-three words, a whole treatise on the art of reading aloud: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

This is not the place for any long discussion of the externals, so to speak, of reading aloud. As we have said, reading in the home circle, or literary clubs, binds mere elocutionary practice closely with a new apprehension of the sense of what is read, and promotes in a high degree the growth of the culture of all the persons who take part in it. Fortunately, the habit is being revived of late years, both at home and in associations of readers. It can be taken up at any time; nothing is easier than to find listeners more than willing to be "read to"; and the custom will prove to repay cultivation to an unlimited extent. Of course reading aloud is slower work than reading to one's self; but the advantages of deliberate thought, and of a fellowship with the minds of others, more than make up this loss.

Some helpful hints on social literary work for women—hints which apply, for the most part, equally well to men, or to the literary clubs composed of both sexes—may well be reprinted here, from the *Christian Union* in lieu of further words of my own. "In every community," says the journal, "there are intelligent women, with considerable leisure at their command, who have a desire to be helpful, and in the same community there is a class of young women who need intellectual stimulus and guidance. How shall the two be brought together, so that the supply shall meet the demand? Newspapers, magazines, and public libraries all serve an admirable purpose in the intellectual life of the community, but they are not sufficient. What is needed is personal influence and power, and this is just the element which intelligent

women are able to supply. Almost every village, certainly every larger town, contains a number of recent graduates from high-schools and seminaries, who are not able, for one reason or another, to complete their school education by a full college course. Now, to girls of this class, a woman of tact and intelligence can render the greatest possible service by helping them to preserve the habits of study they have already formed, to keep alive the intellectual interest and curiosity that have been awakened in them, and by giving them just that impulse which shall keep them drinking continually at the running streams of knowledge. The training of the best schools fails unless it emphasizes the importance of continual and systematic study as the habit of a lifetime, but it is just this which large numbers of bright and promising graduates from the higher schools fail to carry away with them. They go home from their last term with a latent desire for fuller knowledge, but that desire is not strong enough to carry them through the interruptions home life brings to a regular course of study, and what they need is an impulse from without, and the guidance of some mature and trained mind. Any intelligent woman can find a noble work for herself by opening her doors to girls of this class, and providing in her home a kind of post-graduate course for them. No study and no teaching is so delightful as that which is full of the element of personality, in which teacher and scholars meet on a social basis and as friends mutually interested in the same work, in which the methods are entirely informal and conversational, and the result the largest and freest discussion of the subject. An experiment of this kind need not be a heavy task on the teacher either in time or effort. A class may be formed which shall meet for an hour once or twice a week, taking any subject for study that has vital connection with life. Nothing could be more stimulating and interesting, for instance, than a study of the age of Pericles in Greek history, taking Curtius as a historical basis, and reading in connection an account of the Greek poets of that period, . . . to which may be profitably added discussions on the Grecian art of the day, and chapters from such books as 'Mahaffy's Social Life among the Greeks.' Half a dozen other historical epochs are quite as interesting and fruitful; that of Louis the Fourteenth.

for instance, in French history; that of Elizabeth in English history, the richest and most fascinating epoch in the development of the English race. No subject will be more entertaining in itself or open up so many paths of private reading and study as English literature. An excellent plan would be to take Stopford Brooke's 'Primer of English Literature' as a connecting thread of study, and with it as a guide to make the grand tour of English literature, taking each great author in his turn and making such study of his life and work as would be within the power of an ordinarily intelligent person. Different authors may be assigned to different members of the class, who shall specially study up and give account of them, so that the principal facts of their lives, the special qualities of their work and the particular impulse which they imparted to their age may be made the possession of the whole class. Then there is the great field of art, which by the aid of the admirable text-books now being published, may be intelligently and profitably traversed by those who have no opportunities for technical knowledge, but who desire to know art in its historical aspects, and to be able by knowledge of its historical development to understand the schools of the present day. These hints will suggest a multiplicity of topics that might with the utmost profit be studied in this way. Every woman who desires to make the experiment can easily settle the question of what subject she shall take, by consulting her own culture, her own tastes, and the needs of those whom she wishes to help. The special knowledge to be imparted is not of so much value as the habit of study, which is to be strengthened and made continuous in the life of the student."

In the formation of classes like those indicated above—in which reading aloud must of course play a very large part—or of Shakespeare clubs or social literary organizations in general, two things should never be forgotten; that almost any kind of a beginning is better than none; and that the constitution and by-laws of the society, if it is deemed necessary to have any, should be of the simplest character possible.

Edward Everett Hale says that, in his experience as a parish minister, he looks back on the work which reading classes have done with him, with more satisfaction than

on any other organized effort in which he has shared for the education of the young. His most important hints for the management of such classes are as follows:

"It seems desirable that a class shall be of such a size that free conversation may be easy. If the number exceeds thirty, the members hardly become intimate with each other, and there is a certain shyness about speaking out in meeting. The size of the room has some effect also in this matter.

"I think that in the choice of the subject the range may easily be too large. It seems desirable that the members of the class shall know at the beginning what their winter's work is to be so specifically that they can adjust to it their general readings. Even the choice of novels for relaxation, or the selection of what they will read and what they will not, in newspapers, magazines, and reviews, depends on this first choice of subject. The leader of the class should give a good deal of time to preparation. The more he knows, the better, of course; but all that is absolutely necessary is that he shall keep a little in advance of the class and shall be willing to work and read. A true man or woman will, of course 'confess ignorance' frankly. I should rather have in a leader good practical knowledge of books of reference and the way to use public libraries than large specific knowledge of the subject in hand. Of course it would be better to have both. And I think a class is wise in leaving to its leader the selection of the topic. Granting these preliminaries, I should urge, and almost insist, that no one should attend the class who would not promise to attend to the end. Nothing is so ruinous as the presence of the virgins who have no oil in their vessels, and are in the outer darkness before the course is half done. I think it is well to agree in the beginning on a small fee—of a dollar or half a dollar—which can be expended in books of reference, or supper, or charity, or anything else desirable. The real object of the fee is weeding out unreliable members.

"Every member should have a note-book and pencil, and those who do not take notes should be expelled. What is heard at such classes, with no memorandum to connect it with after-work, goes in at one ear and out at the other.

"To make sure that each member takes notes, it is well to keep one class journal. At the end of each meeting, assign the making up of this journal to some one of the class, selected by accident. The length of this journal should be limited—say to a single page of a writing-book. Otherwise the ambitious members vie with each other in making them long, which is in no way desirable. All you want is the merest brief of the work done at each meeting. . . .

"The leader will very soon get a knowledge of what the different members of the class can and will do. Indeed, the consideration of what they want to do will become an important part of his arrangements. He should remember that they are all volunteers, that it is no business of his to drive up a particular laggard to his work, but rather to make the class as profitable as he can for all."

BOOKS AT HOME.

Everybody ought to own books. A house without books has been well called a literary Sahara; and how many of them there are! We are a "reading people;" but nothing is easier to find than homes in which the furniture, the pictures, the ornaments—everything, is an object of greater care and expense than the library. Is it any wonder that their inmates, whatever their so-called wealth or comfort, are intellectual starvelings?

Among the many wise things that Mr. Beecher has said, there is none wiser than his words about books in the house. "We form judgments of men," says he, "from little things about their houses, of which the owner, perhaps, never thinks. In earlier years when traveling in the West, where taverns were scarce, and in some places unknown, and every settler's house was a house of entertainment, it was a matter of some importance and some experience to select wisely where you should put up. And we always looked for flowers. If there were no trees for shade, no patch of flowers in the yard, we were suspicious of the place. But no matter how rude the cabin or rough the surroundings, if we saw that the window held a little trough for flowers, and that some vines twined about strings let down from the eaves, we

were confident that there was some taste and carefulness in the log-cabin. In a new country, where people have to tug for a living, no one will take the trouble to rear flowers unless the love of them is pretty strong; and this taste blossoming out of plain and uncultivated people, is itself a clump of harebells growing out of the seams of a rock. We were seldom misled. A patch of flowers came to signify kind people, clean beds, and good bread. But in other states of society other signs are more significant. Flowers about a rich man's house may signify only that he has a good gardener, or that he has refined neighbors, and does what he sees them do. But men are not accustomed to buy *books*, unless they want them. If on visiting the dwelling of a man in slender means we find that he contents himself with cheap carpets and very plain furniture in order that he may purchase books, he rises at once in our esteem. Books are not made for furniture, but there is nothing else that so beautifully furnishes a house. The plainest row of books that cloth or paper ever covered is more significant of refinement than the most elaborately carved étagère or sideboard. Give us a house furnished with books rather than furniture. Both, if you can, but books at any rate! To spend several days in a friend's house, and hunger for something to read, while you are treading on costly carpets and sitting on luxurious chairs, and sleeping upon down, is as if one were bribing your body for the sake of cheating your mind. Is it not pitiable to see a man growing rich, augmenting the comfort of home, and lavishing money on ostentatious upholstery, upon the table, upon everything but what the soul needs? We know of many and many a rich man's house where it would not be safe to ask for the commonest English classics. A few garish annuals on the table, a few pictorial monstrosities, together with the stock religious books of his 'persuasion,' and that is all. No poets, no essayists, no historians, no travels or biographies, no select fiction, no curious legendary lore. But the wall paper cost three dollars a roll, and the carpet cost four dollars a yard! Books are the windows through which the soul looks out. A home without books is like a room without windows. No man has a right to bring up his children without surrounding them with books if he has the means to buy them. It is a wrong to his

family. He cheats them! Children learn to read by being in the presence of books. The love of knowledge comes with reading and grows upon it. And the love of knowledge in a young mind is almost a warrant against the inferior excitement of passions and vices. Let us pity these poor rich men who live barrenly in great bookless houses! Let us congratulate the poor that, in our day, books are so cheap that a man may every year add a hundred volumes to his library for the price which his tobacco and his beer would cost him. Among the earliest ambitions to be excited in clerks, workmen, journeymen, and, indeed, among all that are struggling up in life from nothing to something, is that of owning and constantly adding to a library of good books. A little library growing larger every year is an honorable part of a young man's history. It is a man's duty to have books. A ibrary is not a luxury, but one of the necessaries of life."

In this connection, do you remember Chaucer's "Clerk of Oxenford," who stinted himself in every other way in order that he might have money to buy books?

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also,
That unto logik hadde long i-go,
Al-so lene was his hors as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake;
But lokede holwe, and therto soburly.
Ful thredbare was his overest courtepy,
For he hadde nought geten him yet a benefice,
Ne was not worthy to haven an office.
For him was lever have at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes, clothed in blak and reed,
Of Aristotil, and of his philosophie,
Than robus riche, or fithul, or sawtrie.
But al-though he were a philosophre,
Yet hadde he but litul gold in cofre;
But al that he mighte gete, and his friendes sende,
On bookes and his lernying he it spende,
And busily gan for the soules praye
Of hem that yaf him wherwith to scolaye.
Of studie took ha moste cure and heed.
Not oo word spak he more than was neede;
All that he spak it was off heye prudence,
And short and quyk, and full of gret sentence.
Sownynge in moral manere was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.

"To be without books of your own is the abyss of penury; don't endure it!" exclaims Ruskin. Lyman

Abbott declares that "the home ought no more to be without a library than without a dining-room and kitchen. If you have but one room, and it is lighted by the great wood fire in the flaming fire-place, as Abraham Lincoln's was, do as Abraham Lincoln did: pick out one corner of your fire-place for a library, and use it." Still another truth is well stated by Sir Arthur Helps in a few words: "A man never gets so much good out of a book as when he possesses it."

The influence of the home library upon all the members of the family, and especially the younger ones, can hardly be overstated. The biographies of literary men, and of great men not literary, are full of testimonies to the value of the neighborhood and society of books in early youth. "I like books," says Dr. Holmes, "I was born and bred among them." He has lately told us, in an amusing way, what sort of a library he was "brought up" in; and, great reader though he has been, has lamented that he has not read even more: "It was very largely theological, so that I was walled in by solemn folios, making the shelves bend under the loads of sacred learning. Walton's Polygot Bible was one of them. 'Poli-synopsis' was another; a black-letter copy was of Fox's 'Acts and Monuments,' another, and so on. Higher up on the shelves stood Fleury's 'Ecclesiastical History,' in twenty-five volumes octavo. In one of these volumes a book-worm had eaten his way straight through from beginning to end, leaving a round hole through every leaf, as if a small shot had gone through it. My father wrote some verses about it, I recollect, beginning: 'See here, my son, what industry can do.' I wish I had profited better by them. I have not been the most indolent of mortals, but the industry of some of my acquaintances . . . makes me feel as if I had been lazy in comparison. I do not remember whether I have told this in any of my books or not; at any rate, the lesson taught by the book-worm and turned into verse by my father is one by which any young person may profit." Another contemporary writer, Edmund About, has similarly ascribed his formation of the reading habit to his father's care in collecting a library: "Reading is assuredly an excellent thing, and my father never would forego it, after he had attained some leisure and affluence. By degrees he had obtained five or six hundred well-

chosen volumes. He constantly turned over the leaves of the 'Encyclopædia of Useful Knowledge' and Boret's manuals; he had even subscribed with three or four neighbors to a liberal Paris paper; but he prized far above all the knowledge that he had gained quite alone. Gently and patiently he also accustomed me to look and think for myself, instead of imposing upon me his ideas, which my docile, submissive spirit, would have blindly accepted." In lieu of a thousand similar utterances, perhaps it will be enough to quote what a veteran journalist, Mr. Charles T. Congdon, has lately written on the encouragement of a love and a care for books on the part of children: "I would early encourage in children a reverence for books. The need of it is the greater, because school business so tends to raggedness and destruction. And this naturally brings me to a topic which is well worth considering—I mean the care and preservation of books. I have known young people who were highly particular in the conservation of their small libraries; and I think that this is a tendency which it would be well for parents and guardians to encourage. I argue well of a child who carefully conserves its books, covers them, and ranges them on a little shelf in a little row. When I encounter this particularity, I see before me future collectors and bibliographers in embryo. And what I say to the children, I would say to adults. It is so hard to get books, and so easy to lend and to lose them. Nobody can have a library unless he takes good care of what comes into it. All the great gatherings have a small start. There is a curious story of the beginning of Richard Heber's magnificent library, which is told in Burton's 'Book-Hunter,' and which is worth repeating here, because Burton's 'Book-Hunter' has become so scarce. Heber accidentally met with a little volume called 'The Vallie of Varieti,' by Henry Peacham. He took it to Mr. Bindley, the celebrated collector, and asked him if it was not a curious book. 'Yes,' answered Mr. Bindley, 'not very—but rather a curious book.' What came of this, those who know anything of the enormous Heber collection will understand. From that day forth Richard Heber was a bibliomaniac. He would travel hundreds of miles to buy a book which he did not possess. . . . In advising young people respecting the formation of a

library, my advice would be not to lend but to keep. Nobody can have a decent collection unless he takes good care of it; but it is easier to lose than to acquire. I know nothing like the immorality which pervades the ranks of borrowers. They forget to bring back, and sometimes, I fear, they do not forget. I would not say a word about it, for fear of hurting the feelings of somebody who will find my book-plate in some volume upon his shelf if he will look for it, unless, indeed, he has eradicated it—I would not, I say, speak a word of the matter if I were not writing for children, and begging them to keep their books together. It will be such a promising beginning. It will teach such habits of care. It will give them so much pleasure hereafter to look at what so delighted them when the world was new and small things charming. One cannot expect these young people to be learned in Lowndes, or really to know how a book can cumulate in value; but they may take my word for it that what was worth reading, it would be wise to preserve."

I have just happened to find some sensible words of the same sort in a country weekly, the very place where such expressions are likely to do most good to the local public: "Nothing is more important to young people than an early love for good books. In no way can this love be better fostered than by the formation of home libraries. No matter how few or small the books are, to commence with, they will make a beginning, and you will wonder at its growth. Don't have the books scattered about, but collect them. Any boy can make shelves which are good enough, and the very act of getting your books together will form a desire for more. When you have thus made a beginning, make it a rule never to add a poor or 'trashy' book. A good book is worth a hundred of the other kind. In this day of cheap books there is no reason why every boy . . . need not have something of a library." And boys may well remember that from such a beginning great results may grow. From no greater a collection than any young reader can easily make, the historian Gibbon tells us that he gradually formed a numerous and select library, "the foundation of my works, and the best comfort of my life, both at home and abroad."

Aside from the reading of books, their mere society and companionship is of high advantage. Boswell tells us

that Dr. Johnson thought it well even to look at the backs of books: "No sooner had we made our bow to Mr. Cambridge, in his library, than Johnson ran eagerly to one side of the room, intent on poring over the backs of the books. Sir Joshua [Reynolds] observed (aside), 'He runs to the books as I do to the pictures; but I have the advantage. I can see much more of the pictures than he can of the books.' Mr. Cambridge, upon this, politely said, 'Dr. Johnson, I am going, with your pardon, to accuse myself, for I have the same custom which I perceive you have. But it seems odd that we should have such a desire to look at the backs of books.' Johnson, ever ready for contest, instantly started from his reverie, wheeled about and answered, 'Sir, the reason is very plain. Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where can find information upon it. When we inquire into any subject, the first thing we have to do is to know what books have treated of it. This leads us to look at catalogues, and the backs of books in libaries.' Sir Joshua observed to me the extraordinary promptitude with which Johnson flew upon an argument. 'Yes,' said I, 'he has no formal preparations, no flourishing with his sword; he is through your body in an instant.'" People who are accustomed to know where particular books are, are able to fly to them in an emergency; and sometimes a little library at home, well understood, is a more effective armory than a great collection, unknown.

Dr. J. A. Langford, an English writer who has lately made a graceful and serviceable collection of quotations from English authors on books and reading, cites Charles Lamb's expression: "What a place to be in is an old library!" and then proceeds to speak of the society of books, in a strain of affectionate eloquence with which any book-lover can sympathize: "It is a delight to merely look at books—in a state of quiet reverie to dream of the rich fruit which you will not pluck, of the sweet grapes which you will not taste. There, spread before you, is a banquet fit for gods, and the consciousness that you could eat and be satisfied fills up your cup of pleasure to the brim. It is a feast at which the imagination supplies ambrosia and nectar, and, for the time, coarser food is neither required nor desired. You walk in meadows of

asphodel, and in the gardens of the Hesperides, and have no wish to pluck a flower, or to gather the fruit. It is enough that they are there, and that the spirits who guard them are ready to supply you with both." Nor is such a sentiment any less likely to come, in a true sense, to the owner of a few books, than to the visitor at the largest library. The true owner of books loves his books, and they come to have real personalities. When poor Southey, after a life of hard work among books, lost his mind, and even the power to read a word, he spent hours and hours in just wandering through his library, feeling his books, and petting them, and laying his head against them.

It is not necessary to advise buyers to possess this or that particular book, nor to present to them a definite list of ten, fifty, a hundred, or a thousand volumes, and say, "Buy these, and you will have a library." The preceding chapters in this series have sufficiently indicated, I trust, what sort of books one ought to read, and how his selection of books to own may best be guided and limited. Any intelligent person can tell, when he reads a catalogue of publications, or visits a bookstore, what are the standard books for all time, and what are those which are good books for him and his to read. Every one's conscience, too, will tell him what books to shun. Some volumes are to be read for a temporary purpose, and the choice of books to own should, of course, be borne in mind. Buy nothing that you are, or will be, ashamed of, and remember that "art is long, and time is fleeting." In a word, choose your books as you would choose your friends and helpers.

The collector of a home library should not be discouraged because there are so many books in the world, and he can buy so few. Says Emerson: "I visit occasionally the Cambridge Library, and I can seldom go there without renewing the conviction that the best of it all is already within the four walls of my study at home. The inspection of the catalogue brings me continually back to the few standard writers who are on every private shelf; and to these it can afford only the most slight and casual additions. The crowds and centuries of books are only commentary and elucidation, echoes and weakeners of these few great voices of Time." In precisely the same strain are these words from a recent editorial in the *Pall*

Mall Gazette, of London: "It is some comfort to reflect that without possessing a library equal to that of the British Museum, and indeed one which can be coaxed into a single room of moderate dimensions, one may have everything in the way of literature which has been so far produced by the human race which is still worth reading —not to say a good deal more. A large collection of English poets, from Chaucer to Cowper, will go upon a small shelf; and all that has since been written of any importance will fail to fill another. Three-fourths even of that collection is of interest only in a historical sense. And truly it suggests melancholy as well as comfort to look round any decent library, to mark the collected works even of the greatest, and to remember how small is the proportion of grain to chaff."

As for the choice of editions of books to own, a remark of Dr. Johnson's is worth remembering, though, of course, not of universal application: "Books that you may carry to the fire, and hold readily in your hand, are the most useful after all."

The care of the home library should chiefly consist of keeping its contents accessible and neat. Books that are imprisoned, or are kept in unfrequented rooms, are deprived of half their usefulness. It is better to have a book worn out with use, or faded by sunlight, or kept where it needs a daily dusting, than to have it preserved like a stuffed bird in a glass case. Open shelves are better than glass-doored bookcases, and the original binding of the book is better than a brown-paper cover. Who would like a friend always dressed in a "duster?" or who would enjoy living in one of those melancholy rooms where all the furniture is shrouded in linen? Brown paper book-covers may be excusable in public libraries, but never in private ones. A few hints, selected from a recent paper by Mr. S. L. Boardman, will be found serviceable: "Whatever the room chosen for the library, let it be warm and sunny, on the south side of the house if possible, and plainly furnished, for what furnishing so gorgeous and attractive as good books? An open fire is the only means of warming that should ever be thought of in a library room. . . . And remember; no glazed doors! I was gratified a few weeks ago, in visiting a friend, to find that he had taken the glazed doors from his library

cases; and I wish everybody who has these useless things would do the same. They are not a protection against dust; they are always in the way; no one is going to carry away your books without leave when you invite him to your library; and when you want a book you do not care to be bothered by a bunch of keys. Besides, books have a far more cheerful and social look when you can readily see them, and handle them, and become acquainted with them, than when they are locked up as though you were afraid somebody would read them, or that they would make somebody happy if he could only turn over their magic pages. Open cases, then, for all books in private libraries, especially in what we call 'working libraries.' . . . Do not put too much money in expensive and luxuriant bindings. I am not talking to the wealthy bibliophile who is able to employ Bedford, or Pawson, or Charles White to bind his books regardless of cost, but to the average book lover or collector. Put the extra money your fine bindings would cost into more and more serviceable books, and be happy. Choose editions in plain substantial dress, and leave elaborate gilding, and blind tooling, and silk linings, to your exquisite fancier. . . . Books should never be crowded tightly on the shelves. They should be so kindly disposed as to gently support each other. Great injury comes from placing them too closely together. Books are generally taken down from their positions by the top of the backs, and in many, many instances I have seen books, some of which were in their day strongly bound, completely broken away at the back from being pulled carelessly out of position. In removing a book from its place the proper way is first to loosen the books standing each side of the one wanted, by giving them a gentle sideward pressure; then, tipping the book from you at the top and taking hold of the bottom, gently draw it out. Do not pile books flat-ways upon the top of those standing upright in the case. It injures those upon which they rest very much. Remember the advice of old Richard De Bury centuries ago, 'never to approach a volume with uncleanly hands.' Books are easily soiled, paper and binding retaining the imperfection of the least pressure of unwashed hands. Dust off the books every day, and remember that, like house plants, they need a constant supply of fresh air.

They are dear friends. We become attached to them from constant intercourse, and when we remember how much enjoyment we receive from their silent, tender companionship, we should in return treat them well, give them the best room in the house, and teach our children and visitors to pay to them due respect."

THE USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

Every town ought to have a library containing as many volumes as the town has inhabitants. Such a library becomes at once the center of the intellectual life of the town, and affects the morals and manners of the entire community. And more; its influence stretches out into the whole country, wherever its readers may chance to go; and its importance is not for a moment to be compared with the entire sum of the mercantile and manufacturing interests by which it is surrounded. A town with a library can be distinguished easily from one which lacks any such collection of books; and those parts of the country in which town libraries abound are the parts which are most influential in every department of intellectual and even material labor. "Let those," says a recent writer, "who pride themselves upon their devotion to the so-called practical, reflect that the advantages of a library are no longer of a purely literary character, and are becoming less and less so; that the 'arts and mysteries' of manufacture are no longer taught by word of mouth alone to indentured apprentices, but that the 'master workmen' of the nineteenth century speak through books to all; and that in proportion as our workmen become intelligent and skillful does their labor increase in value to themselves and to the state."

The usefulness of a public library to all classes of the community, and some of the methods by which that usefulness may be extended, have been well stated in a recent address to the people of Springfield, Mass., on behalf of the city library of that place. "Here," says this address, "are more than 40,000 volumes of books, old and new, from which your selections can be made. Catalogues lying upon the tables will aid you in your choice; if you do not readily find what you want, the librarian and his

assistants are always ready to help you. Those who frequent the library will testify that the intelligent and painstaking service of these librarians in aiding those who are selecting books and studying subjects is of great advantage to them. Here are many books of reference of which all our reading people ought to avail themselves. Here are the great encyclopedias, the dictionaries, the gazetteers, the concordances, that will throw light on the puzzling questions you meet in your reading. You have only to step into the library as you pass and obtain the information you desire. Many of you might turn the library to good account in your several callings. Mechanics who seek to perfect themselves in the industrial arts may obtain here books, some of them finely illustrated, on physics, on mechanical engineering and drawing, and on various topics in which they are interested. Architects, builders, and landscape gardeners may gain from the treatises on these shelves, hints that will be of use to them in practical work as well as in design. Those who are engaged, whether on a large or a small scale, in agricultural or horticultural pursuits, may derive considerable assistance from the treatises and reports filling a large department of this library. Students of art will find here not only a variety of critical and practical treatises, but a good collection of prints and engravings. To professional men, whether clergymen, physicians, lawyers, or journalists, the library affords many advantages. It contains a fair selection of books representing the literature of each of these professions, and valuable books, that individuals are not always able to procure for themselves, are added from time to time. Those who are interested in the study of the Bible may consult in the library a large and admirable selection of Bible dictionaries, commentaries, introductions, histories, etc., covering and illustrating the whole subject. Those who are studying any question of immediate popular interest—temperance, labor, finance, tariff, woman suffrage, education—may easily, with a little help from the librarians, supply themselves here with ample information. The teachers in our public and private schools may make the library very serviceable to themselves and to their pupils by consulting it frequently, and by directing the reading of students. Upon many of the topics taught in the grammar schools

and upon most of those taught in the high school, intelligent boys and girls could gain here much additional information that would freshen and confirm their acquisitions in the schoolroom. The library is used in this manner to some extent by teachers and pupils, but the benefits thus arising might be indefinitely increased. Some of the teachers, by arrangement with the librarian, make themselves responsible for books which they loan to pupils who make good use of them, as supplementing their text-books. To the general reader as well as to the special student, the library offers an ample provision. History, biography, social science, political science, travel and discovery, poetry, fiction, essays, sketches—all are here in great variety. And all this is free to all. This great array of books, this pleasant hall lighted and warmed and kept neat and orderly, the service of these polite librarians, is without charge to the reader, young or old. . . . Our citizens are justly proud of their noble library. They have received, already, great benefit and pleasure from the use of it. But it might be used much more freely and with greatly increased profit. It ought to afford not only diversion to our idle people, but instruction and stimulus to our working people and our thinking people. Rightly used, it will be a means of great good to the whole community. To the young, especially, it should be of incalculable advantage. To those who work in our shops and factories, and whose privileges of education have been limited, it offers a great opportunity. None of them ought to feel lonesome or homeless so long as its hospitable doors are open. To bring the library before their notice and encourage them in freely using it, is one of the obvious duties of those who have any responsibility for those young men and women."

The connection between public libraries and public educational systems has attracted new attention of recent years. The superintendent of the Boston schools says that the public library stands of right at the head of the educational system of the city, of which it forms a true part. And on the other hand, he urges that the schools should give instruction in the best methods of reading good books. "Reading is an art which, with a little of almost everything, has been taught in the public schools

immemorially; but how to read a book—an entire book—is an acquisition made by few, and never, so far as I am aware, systematically taught in the public schools."

The public librarian, indeed, should be a public instructor. Much of what may be said of the value of the teacher's influence upon individual scholars—says Mr. Charles A. Cutter, librarian of the Boston Athenæum—and of the satisfaction and encouragement which comes from it, "is true, with very slight changes, of the librarian. The latter must continue what the teacher has begun; he must make a beginning, if he can, where the teacher has failed, and for those with whom the teacher has not come in contact; like the teacher, he must add this to duties already engrossing; like him, he must make a constant series of experiments; and again, like him, he must be—and no doubt he will be—content if in one case in a hundred he produces any visible result. He needs some interest and effort like this, or else his work, however well done is only the work of a clerk or of a bookworm."

"I want very much indeed," says Mr. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., "to see our really admirable town library become a more living element than it now is in our school system—its complement, in fact. Neither trustee nor librarian, no matter how faithful or zealous they may be, can make it so; for we cannot know enough of the individual scholars to give them that which they personally need, and which only they will take; you cannot feed them until you know what they like, and that we, in dealing with the mass, cannot get at. You teachers, however, can get at it, if you only choose to. To enable you to do this, the trustees of the library have adopted a new rule, under which each of your schools may be made practically a branch library. The master can himself select and take from the library a number of volumes, and keep them on his desk for circulation among the scholars under his charge. He can study their tastes and ransack the library to gratify them. Nay, more, if you will but find out what your scholars want—what healthy books are in demand among them—the trustees of the library will see to it that you do not want material. You shall have all the books you will call for. When, indeed, you begin to call, we shall know exactly what to buy;

and then, at last, we could arrange in printed bulletins the courses of reading which your experience would point out as best, and every book would be accessible. From that time, both schools and library would begin to do their full work together, and the last would become what it ought to be, the natural complement of the first—the People's College."

The choice of books for public libraries should be made with care, but with a full remembrance of the fact that there are many tastes in the community, and that, while those tastes can and must be raised, they must first be reached. "What books shall be bought?" asks *The Library Journal*, "what kinds of books? and what books of their kinds? is almost *the* vital question in all libraries; most pressing in the smallest, which have least to spend for books and most need to foster public appreciation. Shall we have fiction or no fiction, or shall we have George Eliot only and not Mrs. Holmes? 'The public library is not to be the private workshop for the few scholars;' 'The public library is not to pander to depraved popular tastes;'—these are growl and counter-growl. . . . We suppose all would agree upon these simple principles—(1) a library must not circulate bad books; (2) it must, within this limit, give the public the books it wants; (3) it must teach it to want better books. These afford, in general, plain sailing, bad books, meaning immoral books, books absolutely hurtful. But there are those who would exclude under that term respectively unliterary books, bad in style; 'sensational' books; all fiction; books religiously unorthodox. It is sufficient to reply that books for reading are of no use unless read, and that if you can get a man to reading he is sure, as Mr. Hale would say, to read 'up and not down.'" But we must remember that young readers must not be given too great influence in the selection of the books, and that under no circumstances whatever must they befurnished with positively bad books. Mr. H. A. Homes urges a preliminary reading of books by competent committees, as has been done with reference to Sunday-school books, by some ladies of Boston and Cambridge: "A large part of the reading in public town libraries is done by persons under twenty-one years of age. For many Sunday-school libraries it has been found necessary to adopt a rule that no book should be received

which had not previously been read and approved by a committee of the school, notwithstanding it had been written, approved, and published expressly for Sunday-schools. Is it not even more important and urgent to secure, by some similar measure, that the books to be loaned from institutions so influential as free town libraries should have some such guarantee that they will be works elevating and ennobling to the minds of their readers?"

An important matter is the location of the library building or room. Mr. A. M. Pendleton has some serviceable hints on this subject in *The Library Journal*: "First, let the room be centrally located, not geographically, but in the most populous part of the town. Plant it among the people, where its presence will be seen and felt. Next, other things being equal, it is better to have it upon the first floor, so that passers-by will see its goodly array of books, and be tempted to inspect them. Care should be taken to have it well lighted, and if possible have a second room, in which visitors can linger over periodicals and other entertaining works. The wise library manager, like the children of this world, will hold out as many seductions as possible. Encourage dalliance by scattering about temptations. If the sight of evil tempts to evil, so the presence of good things quickens the desire to possess them. A cheery room, tastefully arranged and kept, a generous display of books, and numerous persons coming and going, will determine the popular tide to your quarters. These are elements of a successful library, often as important as the character of the books themselves. A library pushed into a dark corner, or an unsightly closet, or lodged in the rear part of a store, will never have a strong hold upon a people. If it be possible, have it by itself. Do not locate it in a store because a clerk who is busy with other things most of the time will attend to it now and then. Cheap labor is often the most expensive. Things that will do, makeshifts of one kind or another, we are all compelled to accept; but accept them as the last resort, and not as the ready confession of our good-for-nothingness. Covet the best things, and, when attainable, be satisfied with nothing less."

Let it not be thought that a town library is only a luxury for great cities or rich communities. "In the work

of popular education through libraries, it is, after all, not the few great libraries, but the thousand small that may do most for the people." The present writer can sincerely say that he owes more to the library of his native town (then containing, perhaps four thousand volumes) than he does to his whole college course, in which the use of very much larger libraries played a great part. And others feel a similar debt of gratitude to town libraries far smaller than this—libraries of no more than a few hundred books, or even less, kept in a few poor shelves in some town-house or country store. The thing to do is to make a beginning of a local library. If your community has none, it ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself. There must be ten good books in it, or the money to buy them. Gather these together and start a library at once; the life of the whole neighborhood will immediately be made that much the nobler and stronger.

THE TRUE SERVICE OF READING.

The true service of reading is something more than to afford amusement for an idle hour. Most readers will admit this, although their practice is too often opposed to the principle whose theoretical correctness they readily accept. And it is also to be remembered that the proper end to be sought in reading is something far more than mere acquirement of knowledge, or attainment of individual culture. A wise or a highly cultured person may be one who has missed the genuine good of reading, quite as effectually as though he were ignorant and uncultured. The end and aim of all reading should be the proper development of a true and high personal character, and the utilizing of one's own acquirements in the work of making other men nobler and better than they now are.

In this end and aim unwise writers and readers manifestly have no share. "Literature," says President Porter, "must respect ethical truth, if it is to reach its highest achievements, or attain that place in the admiration and love of the human race which we call fame. The literature which does not respect ethical truth, ordinarily survives as literature but a single generation." But literature which does respect ethical truth is that which survives

through the centuries, and which plays its part in the betterment of the world long after the whole face of civilization has changed. He who recognizes literature of this class, and takes it to his heart, with the resolve to use it as a trust rather than a selfishly-hoarded possession, gets the greatest benefit for himself and brings the greatest advantage to others.

The sense of the preciousness and the perpetuity of good books, in their influence on the world through the ages, is one which very many writers have expressed in words of reverence. Keats exclaims, in one of his glowing lyrics:

> Bards of passion and of mirth,
> Ye have left your souls on earth!
> Have ye souls in heaven too,
> Double-lived in regions new? . . . . .
> Thus ye live on high and then
> On the earth ye live again;
> And the souls ye left behind you
> Teach us, here, the way to find you,
> Where your other souls are joying,
> Never slumber'd, never cloying.
> Here, your earth-born souls will speak
> To mortals, of their little week;
> Of their sorrows and delights;
> Of their passions and their spites;
> Of their glory and their shame;
> What doth strengthen and what maim.
> Thus ye teach us, every day,
> Wisdom, though fled far away.
> Bards of passion and of mirth,
> Ye have left your souls on earth!
> Ye have souls in heaven too,
> Double-lived in regions new!

"Of all the things which man can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful, and worthy are the things we call books," says Carlyle. And again, Carlyle declares: "Certainly the art of writing is the most miraculous of all things man has devised. Odin's runes were the first form of the work of a hero; books, written words, are still miraculous runes, the latest form! In books lies the soul of the whole past time; the articulate, audible voice of the past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. Mighty fleets and armies, harbors and arsenals, vast cities,

high-domed, many-engined—they are precious, great; but what do they become? Agamemnon, the many Agamemnons, Pericleses, and their Greece; all is gone now to some ruined fragments, dumb, mournful wrecks and blocks; but the books of Greece! There Greece, to every thinker, still very literally lives; can be called up again into life. No magic rune is stranger than a book. All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been; it is lying in magic preservation in the pages of books. They are the chosen possession of men." In The Spectator is this eloquent passage by Addison: "As the Supreme Being has expressed, and as it were printed his ideas in the creation, men express their ideas in books, which by this great invention of these latter ages may last as long as the sun and moon, and perish only in the general wreck of nature. . . . There is no other method of fixing those thoughts which arise and disappear in the mind of man, and transmitting them to the last periods of time; no other method of giving a permanency to our ideas, and preserving the knowledge of any particular person, when his body is mixed with the common mass of matter, and his soul retired into the world of spirits. Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind, which are delivered down from generation to generation, as presents to the posterity of those who are yet unborn." Herrick wrote to a friend whom he had commemorated in verse:

> Looke in my booke, and herein see
> Life endlesse sign'd to thee and me:
> We o'er the tombes and fates shall flye,
> While other generations die.

And Spenser sung in stately lines:

> For deeds doe die, however noblie donne,
> And thoughts do as themselves decay;
> But wise words, taught in numbers for to runne,
> Recorded by the Muses, live for ay;
> Ne may with storming showers be washt away
> Ne bitter breathing windes with harmful blast
> Nor age, nor envie, shall them ever wast.

Milton said, in his noble Areopagitica (or plea for the freedom of the press): "Bookes are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of Life in them to be as active as that Soule was whose progeny they are; nay,

they do preserve as in a viall the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet on the other hand unlesse warinesse be us'd, as good almost kill a man as kill a good Book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good Booke, kills Reason itselfe, kills the Image of God as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master-spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a Life beyond life. . . . We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labors of publick men, how we spill that season'd Life of Man preserv'd and stor'd up in Bookes; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome; and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in tho slaying of an elementall Life, but strikes at that etheriall and fift essence, the breath of Reason itselfe, slaies an Immortality rather then a Life." Richard Baxter thought the written word more powerful than the spoken one:—"Because God hath made the excellent, holy writings of his servants the singular blessing of this land and age; and many an one may have a good book, even any day or hour of the week, that cannot at all have a good preacher; I advise all God's servants to be thankful for so great a mercy, and to make use of it, and be much in reading; for reading with most doth more conduce to knowledge than hearing doth, because you may choose what subjects and the most excellent treatises you please; and may be often at it, and may peruse again and again what you forget, and may take time as you go to fix it on your mind; and with very many it doth more than hearing also to move the heart." Coleridge compares books to fruit-trees:—"It is saying less than the truth to affirm that an excellent book (and the remark holds almost equally good of a Raphael as of a Milton) is like a well chosen and well tended fruit-tree. Its fruits are not of one season only. With the due and natural intervals, we may recur to it year after year, and it will supply the same nourishment and the same gratification, if only we ourselves return to it with

the same healthful appetite." James Freeman Clarke closes an excellent chapter on reading with these grave words:—"Let us thank God for books. When I consider what some books have done for the world, and what they are doing, how they keep up our hope, awaken new courage and faith, soothe pain, give an ideal life to those whose homes are hard and cold, bind together distant ages and foreign lands, create new worlds of beauty, bring down truths from heaven—I give eternal blessings for this gift, and pray that we may use it aright, and abuse it never."

Is it any wonder, then, that John Lyly gave his son this advice:—"My good sonne, thou art to receive by my death wealth, and by my counsel wisdom, and I would thou wert as willing to imprint the one in thy heart, as thou wilt be ready to beare the other in thy purse; to bee rich is the gift of Fortune, to bee wise the grace of God. Have more minde on thy bookes then thy bags, more desire of godliness than gold, greater affection to dye well, then to live wantonly." "The only true equalizers in the world are books," says Dr. Langford; "the only treasure-house open to all comers is a library; the only wealth which will not decay is knowledge; the only jewel which you can carry beyond the grave is wisdom." "Books are the best of things, well used," says Emerson; "abused among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire." "In any choice of books," urges James Russell Lowell, "always remember what Milton said, that 'a good book is the life-blood of a master spirit;' and also recall the advice of Cato, always to 'keep company with the good.'"

In a word, every reader may well bear upon his heart, as his guide toward right reading, that motto which one sometimes sees deeply cut in the walls of old churches: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*—"For the greater glory of God."

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